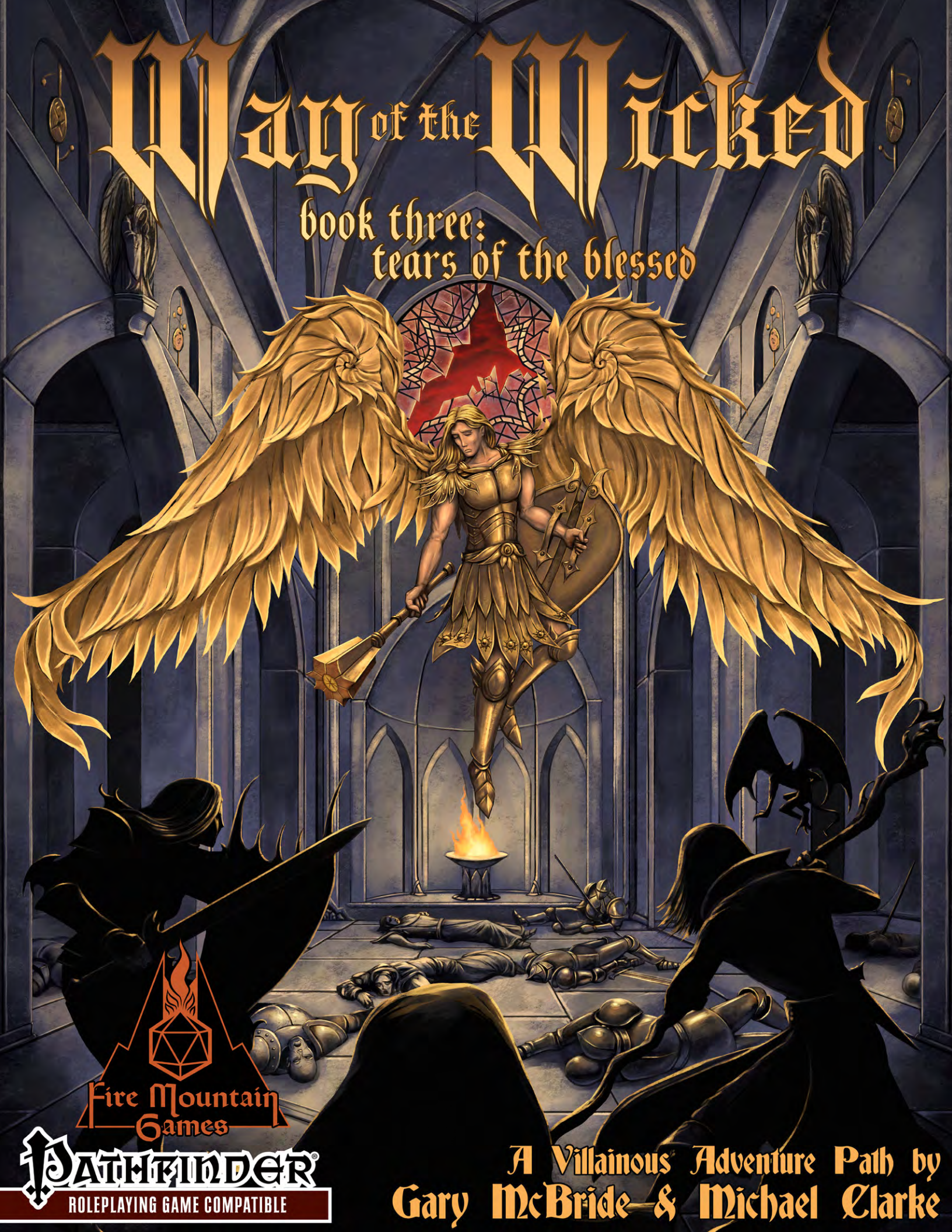
Way of the Wicked

book three: tears of the blessed



Fire Mountain Games

Pathfinder® Roleplaying Game Compatible

A Villainous Adventure Path by

Gary McBride & Michael Clarke

Player's Map
Lands of the Yutak
Savage North
Farholde
Horn of Abaddon
Seal Isle
Bugbear Camp
Lake Tarik
The Borderlands
Balentyne
Heartland
Ambryl
Lorringsgate
Caer Bryr
Tarrington Fields
Ghastenhall
Daveryn
Cambrian Bay
Branderscar
Matharyn
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The Kingdom of Talingarde
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Way of the Wicked

book three: tears of the blessed

A Villainous Adventure Path

by

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and

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and

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"War never takes a wicked man by chance, the good man always."

--Sophocles

ADVANCEMENT

This campaign uses the medium advancement track.

Act One: Ghastenhall

Our villains arrive in the city of Ghastenhall. They should be 10th level by their arrival.

Act Two: An Army of the Damned

Our villains build the army to storm the Vale of Valtaerna. This puts them half way to 11th level.

Act Three: The Battle of Saintsbridge

The army raids Valtaerna upon the advent of winter. The battle elevates them to 11th level.

Act Four: Three Months of Terror

The PCs have three months to slay everyone that opposes them in the Vale. This season of slaughter raises them to 12th level.

Act Five: The Cathedral of Mitra Made Manifest

The final showdown occurs in the great Cathedral where the undying lord of the Order of St. Macarius dwells. With his defeat, our villains should be 13th level.

What Next?

13th level is where Book Four: Of Dragons and Princesses begins. Chargammon awaits.

Introduction: Attack of the Unused Statblock

Over the course of my career as a gamer, I've bought a lot of monster books. A good bestiary is a thing of beauty. It's likely buying a bag full of adventure seeds. When you encounter a cool monster, the creature demands that you find a place for it in your next campaign. And where would such a creature lair? What would it want? What it is up to? These are rich questions with legions of action-packed answers. Yes, I am a fan of a good monster book.

The best of these tomes and compendiums are always packed with countless abominations, horrors and beasts. But they also had another kind of creature hidden within their pages. This is a rare beast – definitely the odd man out. This is no unholy abomination or ravenous beast. This is the good guy monster.

Amongst their ranks are the angels and archons, the metallic dragons, the phoenix, the lammasu, and the good celestials of every stripe. Most of those monsters, in my regular course of play, I never use. And when they see use, it isn't against the PCs. They are heralds or messengers or patrons or allies. And only rarely do those need stat blocks. I corrupted a few into effective villains, true enough. But largely, the good guys languish in my bestiary collection, unused and ignored.

With "Tears of the Blessed" we change that.

Welcome to the adventure where your players get to fight an avalanche of good guy monsters. This is the adventure where an angel is the big boss at the end of the book. We've had a few good guy monsters already in "Way of the Wicked". Book One had the lantern archons. Book Two had the treant, the lillend, the moon dogs, the avoral and the silver dragon. But this is the chapter where that count explodes. In Book Three, the players are going to be assaulting one of the holiest sites in all of Talingarde – the Vale of Valtaerna. And that locale is lousy with good guy monsters.

We skip only the good guy dragons. None of those are to be found. We've just had the players slay Argossarian the silver. Another dragon so soon – that would probably be too much. Dragons need to be memorable encounters. Fear not – they'll be back. There are prominent good dragons in both Book Four and Book Six.

After the complexity of Book Two: Call Forth Darkness, this is a simpler adventure. This is an adventure about sacking a temple of any enemy religion that threatens your cause. That is hardly new ground. In fact the very first adventure published for any roleplaying game was exactly the same sort of thing. How can we make such a well-worn plot fresh and interesting?

First, the PCs don't come alone. They lead an army and in fact the first sections of this book deal not with the temple but with building that army and fighting the Battle of Saintsbridge. Rather than include a complex war game, we've instead chosen a narrative approach to the battle that keeps the action focused on the PCs.

Second, the PCs don't just have to simply slay the enemy, they also have to keep them contained. This mission of murder depends upon secrecy.

Third, this is the only published adventure that I'm aware of where the primary enemies are good celestials. Yes, my friends, it is time for your villains to become angel-slayers.

The mission itself is straight forward – seal off the only entrance to the Vale and then over the course of one winter, wipe out every sentient thing that dwells there. Leave no survivors – they'll only be witnesses to the villains' crimes. By the time the snow melts, the pilgrims of spring will arrive to find their precious stronghold of light a burned out ruin. Their divine healers are gone just as the worst plague in a century rages unchecked through the major cities of Talingarde. And on the battle front, the Fire-Axe wins victory after victory.

This is a dark time for Talingarde and it is your villains' fault.

Glorious.

-- Gary

Book Three: Tears of the Blessed

Adventure Background: Doubts and Deviltry

It happened in the last day of the Horn, when the ritual to call forth the daemon prince Vetra-Kali came to its conclusion. It was then via his scrying that Cardinal Adrastus Thorn saw Sir Richard Havelyn for the first time. As he gazed upon the young paladin hero, he saw her – Bronwyn, his long ago beloved – reflected in that paladin. This was Bronwyn's son, her only child, the last vestige of her upon this plane. This was Thorn's nephew. This was all that remained of *her*.

Cardinal Thorn has traded his humanity for hatred. He has never doubted his mission of vengeance. But now, upon his iron throne in the Agathium, he has for the first time a vestige of doubt. It is in that moment he makes a fateful decision. He will not see Sir Richard dead. He will save this paladin's life.

If Sir Richard escapes, he need do nothing. He simply watches the battle with clenched fist and sighs in relieve when Havelyn escapes. If Sir Richard did die, his actions are more direct. He teleports the corpse from the Horn before it can be further desecrated and into his sanctum in the north. He raises Sir Havelyn from the dead (though never allowing him to regain consciousness) and returns him to the south. Thorn has convinced himself that this is not a betrayal of his mission. He will corrupt the paladin and make him into Asmodeus' greatest servant. *"The time will come when you sit upon the throne of Talingarde, swathed in infernal glory, my servant."*

Either way, the paladin is now in Matharyn, capital of Talingarde, firmly convinced that Mitra has preserved him for the holy purpose of stopping the servants of Asmodeus. But Sir Richard is mistaken. It was not Mitra the Shining Lord that saved the paladin's life. It was the last high priest of Asmodeus in Talingarde.

Thorn's actions were not unobserved. No such powerful use of divine magic would ever escape the notice of the lords of Hell. A contract devil named Dessiter saw the deed or sensed the intent. He realized that the great Cardinal Thorn had a weakness that may interfere with the wishes of his dread master. The devil did as devils do. He schemed.

Dessiter of the Phistophilus has decided that the future may not lie with the Cardinal Thorn. This errand of retribution may need to be passed into more merciless hands. But who is worthy?

Toppling the Second Pillar

Four pillars keep Talingarde intact. The first pillar is the Watch Wall. That pillar has crumbled to ash. Two fortresses of the Watch Wall are broken – Balentyne and Lorringsgate. There is now a wide open entryway from the Savage North into Talingarde.

Thorn turns his attention now to the second pillar – the Order of Saint Macarius. The Order counts among its membership virtually every divine spellcaster in service to the Shining Lord, Mitra in Talingarde. Its healers and saints have restored the people in times of peace and aided the military in times of war. Within their fortress-monastery in the Vale of Valtaerna, the Order guards perhaps the most sacred site in all of Talingarde.

Thorn wishes to see it burn. And he wishes the task done soon. Summer fades and winter is close at hand. The Vale is a small mountain valley and during the winter months its only pass becomes treacherous. The Vale seals itself off and no pilgrims visit. For three months, the defenders of the Vale are cut off from the outside world.

Cardinal Thorn's plan is simple. He will assign his most dangerous servants – the Ninth Knot – to personally lead an army to the Vale of Valtaerna. The army will break the defenses and slaughter every living thing within the Vale. They will desecrate the temples and bring ruin to the Order of Saint Macarius.

During the same winter this is done, the fifth knot – the Stygian Knot under Barnabus Thrane – will spread the Tears of Achlys (acquired in Book Two) throughout the trade hub of Ghastenhall. The pestilence will run rampant and as the winter lifts, the pilgrims will return to the Vale desperate for relief and divine aid.

And they will find nothing but ashes and death. It will be a grand demoralizing stroke for Talingarde. With the second pillar broken, the plague will weaken the south. Talingarde will be one step closer to annihilation.

Still, there are difficulties. So far the cult of Asmodeus has largely kept itself hidden. Only in Farholde has there been an evidence of their involvement (see Book Two) and Farholde is a remote colony, far from the capital and far from the center of Talingarde's power.

This then is the PC's task. Deliver the tears to the Stygian Knot. Raise an army. And in one winter destroy the Vale of Valtaerna. Do this in such a way as it looks like rampaging bugbears. Make sure that anyone who knows the truth about the Cult of Asmodeus dies in battle. Plunge a knife into Mitra's heart and then retreat to the shadows. What could be simpler?

The Course of the War

The war goes well for the Nine Knots. The list of the Fire-Axe's victory grows long – Balentyne, Ambryl, Tarrington Fields, and Lorringsgate. The armies of Talingarde were overconfident against the bugbear general. They thought Sakkarot Fire-Axe a mere brute leading a disorganized horde of raiders who would scatter before their knights. They now know better.

Still, even in victory, the Fire-Axe's horde needs replenishing. To this end, Thorn has sent his handmaiden devil, the wicked Tiadora, to the North. She has gathered every evil tribe and creature she could find and brought them under the Fire-Axe's banner. It was this errand that kept her busy during the events of Book Two.

Tiadora has done her mission capably. Virtually every tribe of bugbears now bows to the Fire-Axe. She did not stop there. Sakkarot's ranks are swollen with wolf-riding goblins, ogres, trolls, hill giants and even a small cadre of frost giants. These reinforcements have paid off on the battlefield.

At Upandershire Ford the armies of Farholde and Fairlyn met savage defeat. At Janderly Farm, a small group of the Fire-Axe's scouts were caught unaware and slaughtered. But the brilliant Sakkarot quickly realized a patrol was missing and that this could mean an ambush. He used his wolf-riders to flank almost two hundred knights at Westkirk and caught in the vise, inflicted upon the armies of the Borderlands another savage defeat. He presses south now, headed towards the great city of Daveryn. It seems there is nothing to stop him.

After the first year of war draws to a close, winter fast approaches. The horde of the Fire-Axe shelters in the burnt out ruin of the Castle Westkirk. Glutted with stolen loot, they will winter there and reconvene their campaign of destruction in the early spring. The first year of the war has been a great and glorious affair for the Fire-Axe. The second, that is a tale yet to be told.

But Thorn knows that the course of the war is far from certain. King Markadian V called the Brave has finished rallying his army. An army camps near the capital that the Fire-Axe has little hope of defeating. It has been a slow process gathering his knights but now the work is done. With the spring, the king marches north. They head to the Vale of Valtaerna to rally the Order of Macarius to their banner. Thorn wishes them to be denied that aid, certainly, but that will not be enough.

He needs a plan to deal with Markadian once and for all. He has one, but it must be prepared for carefully. This plan is fully detailed in Book Four of this adventure path.

A Fallen Priest

Barnabus Thrane is the closest thing that Cardinal Thorn has to a true friend. Brother Barnabus served with the Cardinal in the priesthood when he was still simply Brother Samuel Havelyn. From the first day he met Samuel, he was overwhelmed by his charisma and intellect. He worshipped the Cardinal and saw with him the potential for greatness. He also witnessed his fall in its entirety. He actually met Bronwyn, saw her beauty firsthand, and recognized Samuel's gnawing obsession with her. In time he succumbed to the Cardinal's great influence and was converted to the worship of Asmodeus.

When the Asmodean Purges began, Brother Barnabus was clever enough to lay low. He kept his distance from Cardinal Havelyn ever urging his friend to be more discrete with his ever growing infernal powers. The Cardinal only laughed. "Who can stop me now?"

The answer came swift enough. The inquisition of Mitra found the Cardinal, tried him and cleansed him in a pyre of purification. Barnabus and all close associates of the Cardinal were investigated, but Barnabus had always been clever enough to keep no paraphernalia of his devotion to the dark prince of Hell. The inquisition judged him innocent. He alone among the Cardinal's original cadre of diabolic devotees managed to escape the inquest.

Still, the suspicion ruined Brother Barnabus' career within the church of Mitra. He was on the fast track to be a bishop before the inquisitors. That was all swept aside by the flames of the Cardinal's pyre. He turned inward becoming a scholar and slowly shut himself off the world. His hatred burned silently within him.

His life changed again when he was visited by the reborn Cardinal Thorn. He pledged his life once more to the Cardinal. Thus did Barnabus Thrane become the leader of the fifth knot. For years his mission has largely been one of reconnaissance. Because of Barnabus, Cardinal Thorn received constant updates on the doings of Mitra's faithful. Because of Barnabus he knows their strengths and weaknesses.

But that time is past. Barnabus waits in the great city of Ghastenhall to meet other servants of Cardinal Thorn – the Ninth Knot. He has been instructed to receive from them a plague of almost unimaginable virulence and to use a network of hired thugs and underlings to distribute the plague through the cities of the south. The thugs are dupes believing they are part of a plan to poison nobles in some sort of power grab. What they don't recognize is that they themselves will become living plaguebearers. They will spread the plague to every corner of Talingarde. And everywhere will be heard the tears of the blessed.

Act One: Ghastenhall

Event One: The Journey into Talingarde's Heart

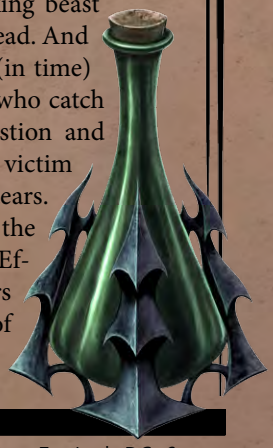
This adventure picks up where Book Two leaves off with Tiadora handing them a small pouch full of emeralds and a handwritten letter from Cardinal Thorn. As they open it Tiadora teleports away her task done.

That leaves the PCs to find a way to Ghastenhall. Likely the PCs have a boat or could get one. They may have the "Seventh Voyage" taken from Traya's Raiders or either of the barges used by the knots to get to Farholde. They can sail around the Caer Bryr, a safe but long route, or they can brave Lake Tarik and the Godscar River. The Godscar cuts right through a mountain range and connects the great inland sea of Lake Tarik to the open waters of the Cambrian Bay. Or perhaps the PCs can now teleport bypassing the journey altogether.

Either way, the journey is uneventful. The only exception is if the PCs are not quite tenth level yet. If they have not reached tenth level, perhaps craft a few random encounters to bump them up. They should be tenth level by the time they reach Ghastenhall.

The Tears of Achlys

So, what are the Tears of Achlys? The Tears are no mundane disease. Instead this pestilence is a very minor self-replicating disease spirit -- the least form of plague daemon. A normal illness is mindless. Not so with the Tears. This horror is about as smart as a dog and above all desires to spread. The Tears can lie in wait, manifesting only when it has the maximum chance of infecting others. It is cunning like stalking beast and relentless in its drive to spread. And unless magically cured it kills (in time) one hundred percent of those who catch it. The Tears begins as exhaustion and perenially red eyes. In time, the victim begins to weep intensely salty tears. Dehydration slowly sets in and the victim wastes away to nothing. Effectively, to suffer from the Tears is to die of thirst regardless of how much you drink. It is a terrible death.



The Tears of Achlys

Type disease, contact, inhaled or injury; **Save** Fortitude DC 16
Onset variable but at least 1 day; **Frequency** 1/day
Effect 1d6 Con damage; **Cure** None. The Tears of Achlys can only be cured by casting *remove disease* on the victim.
Note The Tears has an INT of 3 and can do less damage (perhaps even seeming to be cured) to better infect more victims.

Thorn's Letter

To My Ninth:

Since that day you arrived filthy and famished upon my doorstep, I have always seen within you great potential. And today you prove me correct once more. You have the Daemon's Gift! I could not be more pleased. You have in your possession a terrible weapon and now, we must see it used.

Get thee to Ghastenhall with all haste. Therein seek Barnabus Thrain, master of the Stygian Knot. He awaits you in the Library of Ghaster. Ask him whom he serves. He will answer "only knowledge." Yes, he is a priest of Mitra, but fear not – he has seen the power of our cause. Into Thrain's hand deliver the Gift. He has agents who will see that the Tears are delivered to where it may do the most good. He will have something for you as well – a token of my esteem.

Then I command you; wait in Ghastenhall, avoiding the eyes of our enemies. You will have one month to rest and regain your strength's full measure. Use it well. Prepare yourself for your next mission for it shall be thy greatest test yet.

The Tears of Achlys is a scalpel, my Ninth, and with it we will cut the hated Mitran faith from the heart of Talingarde. When the month is past, Tiadora will fetch you and bring you to audience with the Fire-Axe. He will give to you the kernel of an army. Build upon it! Recruit any who can aid you and once your army is ready, with the first gale of winter – you march to the Vale of Valtaerna, the most holy site in all of Talingarde.

They will not expect a winter assault. Break the Watchtower of Saintsbridge, invade the Vale and during winter's merciless heart destroy everyone in that sacred place. Leave no witness making it look like a bugbear raid. Violate the holy heart of the Cathedral of Mitra Made Manifest and leave not a single soul alive. By the time winter is ended, the Tears will be well spread across Talingarde. The people desperate for respite will run to the simpering Mitrans begging for relief. And they will find in your wake only death and ashes, my Ninth.

Do all as I command and the time of our victory draws ever nearer. Commit my commands to heart and then burn this letter.

–Thorn

Event Two: The City on Death's Door

The PCs arrive in Ghastenhall probably eager to meet with Thrane. If they go directly to the meeting, then skip ahead to Event Three: Thrane. However, more cautious villains may want to get the lay of the land and look for information. If so, use this random rumor table to reveal what they find. Roll 1d20 to determine what the PCs learn:

1. Where are the king and his armies? Why does he do nothing? Has the House of Darius abandoned us? (*This is simple war hysteria. King Markadian V has not abandoned Talingarde, but neither will he march to war prematurely. He builds an army the Fire-Axe cannot defeat.*)

2. The Duke of Ghastenhall offers a bounty for anyone who can claim the head of the medusa that lives in the mountains -- a thousand gold last I heard! Of course, you'll not see me seeking it. What good is gold when you're a statue? (*True. See Act Two for details.*)

3. My dear auntie has fallen ill and seems unable to recover. Perhaps it is time for us to take a pilgrimage to the Vale of Valtaerna and seek the healing of the blessed Order. (*Better do it fast. The Vale's days are likely numbered. See Act Three.*)

4. Can you believe that next week is the festival of Iris already? What's the festival of Iris? Almost a century ago the beautiful princess Iris of Ghastenhall vanished without a trace. They say to this day that if anyone can offer proof of her fate the Duke is bound to perform one favor to the man. (*And if the PCs are clever they have Iris' ring and know that she died by the hand of the Brothers of the Pale Horseman -- see Event Four below for details*).

5. Stay away from the Red Quarter after dark. It gets unsavory and downright dangerous. (*True. Of course, if you are looking to meet criminals and scum, there is no better place. See the Gazetteer for more details*).

6. Three days from now is the Grand Market. What a party! I wouldn't miss it! (*And likely neither should the PCs. The base value and purchase limit both increase by 20% and 1d4 bonus medium and major magic items are available for sale for three days only!*)

7. I've heard rumors an illegal arena in the Red Quarter? This can't be true, can it? Such flagrant lawbreaking! What is happening to Talingarde?! (T*rue. The PCs can get involved in these pit battles if they so choose. See Event Four below.*)

8. They say there are in still vampires in the undercity. It gives me a shiver just thinking about such horrors on the loose in our fair city. (*True. There are indeed vampires in Ghastenhall. The PCs can meet them and even join them if they are so inclined. See Act Two for details.*)

9. A lady of the night was found torn apart in White Quarter! There's a mad killer on the loose! (*False. This pure rumor-mongering. Though killings do happen from time to time, there is no mad killer.*)

10. There are dwarves in the mountains who've been touched by the enemy! How long will it be before these dark dwarves ally with the Fire-Axe? (*Possibly True, if the PCs manage to make it happen in Act Two.*)

11. Did you hear about the Horn of Abaddon? It glowed with green fire for seven months! But why did it stop is what I want to know! (*Why indeed?*)

12. Did you hear about the new magic item salesman? It's said that Murdo's Magnificent Magical Menagerie has wonders beyond count! (Murdo is a charlatan who mostly sells fake items with *magic aura* cast on them.)

13. So much wickedness has befallen Talingarde in the last year -- the breaking of the Watch Wall, the Fire-Axe's invasion, the strange doings in Farholde. Can there be any doubt of the cause? The minions of hell are still among us! The dark prince sets his will against us! Who will save us? (*Who indeed? This rumormonger is dangerously close to the truth. Best to silence him.*)

14. The war in the north is no war at all. The bugbears are savages! They would never dare attack any of the great cities of the south. (*Wishful thinking I'm afraid.*)

15. Varden Jamberlain, the owner of Jamberlain's Apothecary, is a fine old army man. They say he gives a 10% discount to any fellow veterans who will swap war stories with him. (*He also gives a 10% discount to capable liars who convince him they are veterans.*)

16. It is said that Duke Hadrian is mad. I heard rumor that he roams the Castle Ghasten wearing nothing but his crown! (*Not entirely false. The duke is a bit eccentric.*)

17. The Duke is coward! Why won't he lead his army to face the Fire-Axe? (*The Duke is not a coward. He waits to join the King's Army and they will march together. Still, impatience for action is everywhere in Ghastenhall.)*

18. I can no longer sit by while Talingarde is invaded! I'm joining the army tomorrow! (*The army is already overwhelmed with volunteers.*)

19. My fortune-teller spoke of dark omens. She says that Ghastenhall is the city on death's door. I don't like the sound of that! (*An honest fortune-teller? Will wonders never cease?*)

20. Have you ever travelled to Valtaerna? I took the pilgrimage once and was even lucky enough to see the phoenix up close! (*True. There is a phoenix in the vale.*)

Event Three: Thrane

Finding Thrane is no great challenge. Brother Barnabus Thrane is the scholar in residence at the Library of Ghaster, the great repository of knowledge long sponsored by the dukes of Ghastenhall. He is an older human male dressed in the blue robe of a Mitran priest and prominently displays a silver and sapphire holy symbol marking him as a veteran and important member of the priesthood. His eyes though betray a wild intensity. There is definitely something about him that does not seem typical for a Mitran.

If given the code phrase "who do you serve?" or something similar, he only nods and answers *"Only knowledge. If you are interested in seeking knowledge perhaps you could join me for a symposium tomorrow evening in the basement lecture hall."* And then he departs. He will say nothing more and waves away any more comments with an impatient, *"Do I know you, sir/ma'am?"*

Assuming the PCs keep the appointment, they find Barnabus Thrane waiting for them in the disused lecture hall beneath the library. He is not alone. A few rather brutish looking young men are with him (a pair of bodyguards -- NE male human 3rd level warriors). He sends them to guard the entrances. *"We are not to be disturbed. This symposium is invitation only."* They nod and depart.

Once alone he speaks. *"I am the Fifth. And you are?"*

He's hoping for the answer "The Ninth." Anything similar to such as "friends of Thorn" or "servants of the Cardinal" or "the Nessian Knot" though will also earn his nod. If anyone actually says the word "Asmodeus" – he immediately silences them. *"Do not say the name of Father here. The name can draw ... attention."* If they continue he shakes his head, *"You are reckless."*

Once identities are established he becomes more cordial. *"Welcome to Ghastenhall. I am Brother Barnabus Thrane and you are expected. Word has already reached me of your great triumphs. I presume you have something for me."* Hopefully the PCs give him the Tears of Achlys. If they demand more proof, then Barnabus can supply them the name of their master Cardinal Adrastus Thorn. He has even met Tiadora. If that is still not enough, he grabs an arm of a PC and reveals their brand. *"I did not think the forsaken could afford to be so demanding."*

If the PCs do give him the Tears he is entranced briefly by the vial. *"And behold a pale horse and hell followed with them."* He shudders. *"I will do what is asked of me, but I say now that I am filled with dread of this errand. Once unleashed, I am uncertain how easy it will be to put aside the Daemon's Gift."*

If anyone questions Barnabus' loyalty, he scoffs. *"I have always done what is required of me. I have been serving the Cardinal far longer than any of you whelps!"*

He hides the Tears away. *"For now the Tears must wait. The time is not yet right to use this weapon against our enemies. I am told you will be staying in our fair city for a while. Towards that end, I have already arranged for a small villa in the Lord's Quarter – The Crowley Estate. It is stocked and well supplied for a month's stay. There are servants so your stay will be comfortable. My name is not attached to the place so I care not what you do there. I will continue my duties as a keeper of the Library of Ghaster and should you require any assistance you have but to seek me out. We will not meet openly in the Library. Instead, contact me and I will arrange a suitable place.*

"There is one more thing. In exchange for the Tears I was commanded to give you these." He produces a small bag of black jewels, one for each PC. *"Each of you has an iron circlet, yes?"* He produces one of his own with a black jewel already mounted. *"Merely place the jewel in the center and the crown will be strengthened. It is a gift of Thorn's esteem."* The jewel transforms the circlet *into a headband of vast intelligence, alluring charisma or inspired wisdom +2* (whichever is most appropriate for each PC). The *circlets* retain all of its previous properties as well.

That is all Thorn really has to do and if no one does anything else, he leaves. *"With that done, I depart."*

Barnabus is no real threat to the PCs. He is an unarmed and unarmored Lawful Evil old male human 7th level cleric of Asmodeus (domain: trickery) with elite ability scores. He does have a holy symbol of Asmodeus hidden in a magical pocket of his robe and he always has the spell *undetectable alignment* cast on himself. He has not hidden his identity this long by being careless and he is anxious to make this a brief meeting.

Still, Brother Thrane only rarely meets fellow worshippers of "Father" and so is intrigued by the PCs. He is especially curious about their exploits, how they came to serve the Cardinal and how they acquired the legendary *Tears of Achlys*. If the PCs engage him, chat for a while and share a little information, Thrane may open up to them and answer a few questions of his own.

You could have the PCs make a Bluff, Diplomacy or Intimidate skill check, but honestly this scene is probably better handled with roleplaying. Make a note of how the PCs treat Barnabus. If the PCs treat him well and present themselves as intelligent and capable worshippers of Asmodeus, Thrane will gain a respect them. This could be useful later in this adventure path.

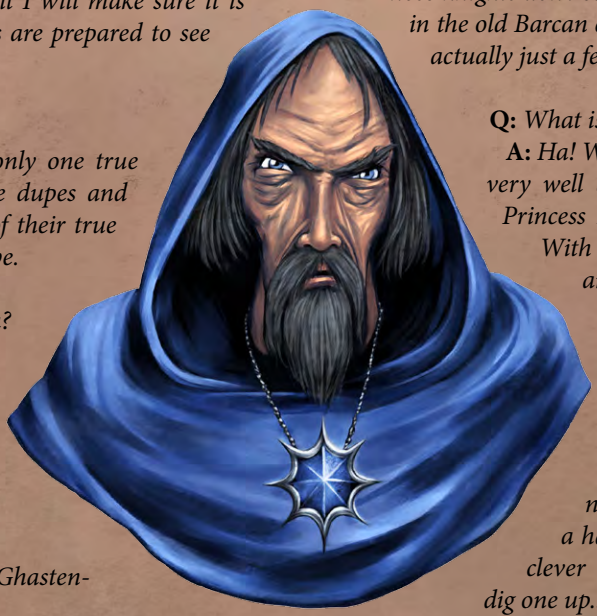
Possible Questions and Answers

Q: *You're a priest of Mitra! Why do you work for … Father?*

A: *Hah! I never thought to hear my choice of faith questioned by black-hearted fellows such as you! It was Thorn himself who showed me the power and truth of Father. The worst mistake this kingdom ever made is to turn their back on the Eternal Prince, master of the Nine. Thorn knew this! His words sang with authority. I was perhaps his first convert. Now that I know the truth, I can never return to the pitiful, failing light of Mitra. I wear his symbol, yes, but only so that I may do the work of my true lord and master.*

Q: *What will you do with the Tears?*

A: *When the time is right I will make sure it is spread far and wide. Agents are prepared to see this work done.*



Q: *You have minions?*

A: *The Fifth Knot has only one true member – me! The rest are dupes and fools. They know nothing of their true master. This is as it should be.*

Q: *Have you met Tiadora?*

A: *I have met that harlot, yes. I have no doubt she's a devil wearing mortal flesh. Though exactly what kind of devil, I am unsure.*

Q: *What is there to do in Ghastenhall for a month?*

A: *You need do nothing. If you crave intellectual pursuits, the Library of Ghaster is a great repository of knowledge. It is the one thing that the Mitrans have arguably done well. Although, even in this they are blind. They censor every tome that questions the supremacy of their god.*

Q: *Books aren't really my thing. Anything else worth doing in this town?*

A: *The Grand Market is in three days. There always many interesting and unusual goods for sale there.*

Q: *I was hoping for something more exciting...*

A: *Perhaps you should seek out the Red Quarter. There you will find the violent raptures of our Father. The Red Quarter has always been a crime ridden neighborhood festooned with brothels and purveyors of pleasures of the flesh. Ghastenhall is a bustling port city after all. But with the attention of the lords drawn by the war, it's grown unruly. There's even an illegal pit fighting arena. Perhaps one as imposing as you of could have a bit of fun. If you find this interesting, you should speak with Martigan Vex at the Golden Palace. Mister Vex they call him. He runs the place. He manages these matters.*

Q: *Are there really vampires in Ghastenhall?*

A: *Been listening to rumors have you? As it turns out this rumor is true. I know for a fact there is at least one vampire in Ghastenhall. He calls himself Prince Gaius Vestromo. He's old and dangerous – best avoided. He's something of a city legend. In calmer times, every year or so, some young knight pledges to quest to destroy him. Those knights don't come back. He is most often sighted in the old Barcan cemetary in the Lord's Quarter. It's actually just a few blocks from your villa.*

Q: *What is this ring? (Iris' ring from Book 2)*

A: *Ha! Where did you find that? That could very well be the ring of the legendary lost Princess Iris. She vanished a century ago. With that ring, you could doubtless get an audience with the Duke. If you find the Princess' bones, by city law the Duke would have to do you one favor. It's an old ridiculous law created by decree of Iris' grief stricken father after her disappearance. Of course, you'd need a hundred year old skeleton of a half-elven maiden to earn that. But clever folk such as you might be able to dig one up...*

Q: *You've known Cardinal Thorn for a long time?*

A: *Yes, but perhaps I've already said too much. Our master will reveal his past to you, at a time of his choosing.*

Q: *He's already told us* (lie). *We know he was once Samuel Havelyn. (Note: Perceptive PCs may have learned this from the Havelyn Family Bible in Balentyne. Only Thorn's real name will cause Thrane to talk about Thorn's past).*

A: *He told you as much as that did, he? I'm shocked. I thought he wished the past buried. Did he tell you that he was condemned for witchcraft and blasphemy and burned at the stake? I was there! I saw him consigned to the flames. But he was reborn by the will of Father and now he is the high priest of Talingarde. Glad am I to serve so mighty a man. If he is a man anymore…*

Story Award: Award a CR 10 reward (9600 XP) for getting useful information out of Thrane.

Event Four: A Month to Kill

The PCs have a month to entertain themselves in Ghastenhall. They can lay low in Crowley Manor but how boring is that? The PCs have a very brief overview of what their mission will be (thanks to Thorn's letter) and so they can do some preliminary prep if they care to. They can take this opportunity to craft magic items, go shopping or engage in petty larceny. Ghastenhall is the premier port town in Talingarde. If they cannot find something here, it doesn't exist on this isle.

This month can also fill another important role. We've already suggested that the journey to Ghastenhall can be a fine way to ensure the PCs are tenth level. This can also be done with an urban side quest. And let's be honest. For ten levels now your villains have been going straight at their plot to get revenge against Talingarde. Haven't they earned a diversion?

In the sidebar, we've given you ten possible ideas for this. And on the next page is a possible bonus encounter featuring pit battles against beasts. None of these side-plots affect the course of this adventure path's main arc. These plots are chances to branch out and do something a little different for a few sessions.

This is also a good month for some character development. Has one of your characters written something about a lost love in their backstory? Have that love interest be here. Do they mention someone in particular who turned them over to inquisitors? They're also in Ghastenhall. Ghastenhall is a large, bustling cosmopolitan place. Populate it with whatever you need for a memorable encounter.

Also if your PCs are using the optional minion rules from Book Two, don't forget that they get four weeks of minion actions here in town. They can reestablish their evil organizations here and start fresh with a new wave of villainy. Four weeks is probably not enough to bring Ghastenhall to its knees, but how will you know if you don't try?

Skipping to the "Good" Parts

Or maybe your PCs don't want a break from villainy to rest for a month. There is no reason they have to rest. They know they're building an army. They could start recruiting allies now. Prince Gaius Vestromo is here in the city. The PCs can negotiate now with the vampire prince (see Act 2, Event 5). The medusa Isevel can be learned about from rumors about town. The PCs could go visit her and try to gain her as an ally. Ultimately, the choice is with your players. Let them run rampant. Thorn will require their services soon enough.

Ten Sidequests in Ghastenhall

1. Crime lord Nicholas Breuder wants his rivals slain and he wants it done by an outsider so it cannot be traced back to him. Our villains can take a break from the revenge business and play mob enforcer.

2. One of Mister Vex's beasts (see the bonus encounter below) breaks out and escapes into the sewers. He wants it back! Of course there is more in the sewers than just escaped beasts.

3. A guard from Branderscar prison has moved to Ghastenhall and on a crowded city street, he recognizes you! Better silence him quick!

4. The Crowley Estate is haunted by Alaena Crowley, once a priestess of Mitra. She has been waiting for you and she will see our villains punished for their wicked deeds.

5. Someone who escaped you is in Ghastenhall. By chance you see the person on the streets. They won't escape you a second time!

6. Did you betray Vetra-Kali? Death cultist assassins are here to avenge their banished lord. Masters of poison and disguise, they could be anyone anywhere.

7. A cargo of rare fireworks from the Far East is for sale in Ghastenhall! One week only!

8. A wizard is selling a banned book of infernal and Asmodean spells on the black market. You could just pay the larcenous cost he's asking or you could break into his tower and steal it! The wizard's tower is not without its defenses of course.

9. One of our villains finds love in the arms of a courtesan. Thorn decides such connections are dangerous and orders the courtesan slain. Will the villain risk violating his oath to Thorn for this newfound lover? Can there be something more to life than vengeance along the Way of the Wicked?

10. Anti-Asmodeus hysteria sweeps the city. The duke places a fifty gold bounty on the heads of every worshipper of the Prince of Hell. The PCs are in no real danger of course. The real question is -- who do our villains turn in?

Bonus Encounter:
The Violent Raptures of Ghastenhall

Since the start of the war and the departure of most of Ghastenhall's military to join the great muster of King Markadian V called the Brave, the Red Quarter has been rampant with crime. Perhaps the most flagrant example of this is Mister Vex's pit fighting arena. Usually, the pit hosts the usual blood sports and small time street fights. But this month something very special is planned.

Mister Vex has been planning this spectacle for months. He has commissioned expert monster hunters rom across the globe to bring a dozen powerful beasts. And every weekend these creatures will face all comers in brutal spectacles of death and danger. It cost him a small fortune but he is certain that it will make him a large one.

Operated in the small arena beneath the Golden Palace, every weekend Mister Vex has three beasts brought in. Anyone who cares to can step into the pit with these beasts and take his chances. The first one to defeat a beast wins a prize that varies from creature to creature. The victor then has a choice of facing the next beast sight unseen or leaving the ring and letting someone else have their chance.

The fights are always one and one and outside help is prohibited. The beasts must be fought alone and once locked in the cage with the beast, there is little choice but to fight to the death. Before every match, Mister Vex dressed in ring master's garb announces the beasts.

Mister Vex has hired a foreign priest to heal the beasts between every battle, so they are always fresh. The priest, a sly eastern mystic known only as Brother Lao, is very corrupt and certainly bribable. Perhaps an easy way to take down some of the more powerful beasts is to wait for others to soften them up.

Mister Vex makes his money on concessions (he runs the bar), prostitution (his girls work the crowd) and of course gambling. All in all, it is a pit of vice right here in Talingarde -- a refreshing change for villains. The matches are always packed and the action is furious. Even if the PCs only come to watch, the spectacle is magnificent.

NOTE: This plot is completely optional and does nothing to advance the adventure path. Mister Vex, Brother Lao and their menagerie of death have no greater part to play in this story. This is simply a fun diversion for PCs who may be feeling starved for some straightforward violence. It does require a little work on the Game Master's part. You must look up the monster statistics (all of which are available at http://www.d20pfsrd.com) and develop Mister Vex and Brother Lao yourself.

Week 1

Beast #1 "The Two-Headed Freak of Nature – The Duo-Death!" Amphisbaena (CR 4, Bestiary 2, 400 gp purse).

Beast #2 "Half-bird! Half-bear! All ferocious! I give you an abomination against nature – the Owlbear!" An Owlbear (CR 4, Bestiary, a 400 gp purse)

Beast #3 "The Living Tank – Smasher!" An Ankylosaurus (CR 6, Bestiary 2,a 600 gp purse).

Week 2

Beast #1 "A visitor from the frozen north. These beasts can actually be quite gentle, ladies and gentleman. This one isn't! One-horn the Impaler!" A Wooly Rhino (CR 6, Bestiary, a 400 gp purse).

Beast #2 "Captured in the Caer Bryr and shipped here at great expense. Ever squashed a bug? It's payback time, ladies and gentlemen. Behold the Slicer!" Slicer Beetle (CR 4, Bestiary 2, a 400 gp purse).

Beast #3 "Here kitty, kitty! Watch out, ladies and gentleman. I think he wants more than a bowl of milk. It's a lion ... yeah, the biggest lion you ever saw. Leo the Lacerator! Dire Lion (CR 5, Bestiary, a 500 gp purse)

Week 3

Beast #1 "This the most venison you've ever seen and I've got bad news – he isn't happy to see you! King Stag!" Megaloceros (CR 4, Bestiary 3, a 400 gp purse).

Beast #2 "The King of snakes, the emperor of death. Venom so powerful it could stop the heart of an elephant. Step into the arena and face your doom – Emperor Naja!" Emperor Cobra (CR 5, Bestiary 2, a 500 gp purse).

Beast #3 "Monkey see, monkey kill! Imported from the heart of darkness, behold the eight wonder of the world – Kongalla!" Girallon (CR 6, Bestiary, a 600 gp purse).

Week 4

Beast #1 "Brought from a distant land and the top of the world. He feasts on human flesh – the beast from the east. The Yeti!" A brain-damaged Yeti (CR 4, Bestiary, but with an Int 3 who cannot speak, a 400 gp purse).

Beast #2 "It doesn't get any weirder than this one. The tentacular terror – the doom with no name – the Strangler!" Tentamort (CR 4, Bestiary 2, a 500 gp purse)

Beast #3 "I would say he was the king of pain, but this one will kill you so quick, you feel nothing. One bite and good night, ladies and gentleman. You asked for him. You demanded him! Ol' Painless!" Allosaurus (CR 7, Bestiary 2, 1000 gp purse)

Act Two: An Army of the Damned

The PCs assemble their army to assault the Vale of Valtaerna.

Event One: The Summons

At last the PC's month of recreation is over. Tiadora teleports into the middle of Crowley Estate like she owns the place. *"Ah, dearest, there you are. You are ready, I presume? The Fire-Axe awaits."*

Tiadora carries with her an ornate scroll case of dark red lacquer wood and brass fittings. If any PC in the party can cast *teleport*, then the scroll case contains precise magical coordinates of where they are headed (to the throne room of the Castle Westkirk). If the PCs can cast teleport but don't have it memorized, then the scroll case contains sufficient scrolls of *teleport* to get them to their destination. And if no one can cast teleport, then it contains two special one-use magic items that will teleport them to the Castle Westkirk and then back to the Crowley Estate.

Tiadora tolerates no delays and is impatient to depart. *"You've had a month to prepare, my lords. Wasn't that enough?"*

If anyone asks Tiadora why they are going to see the Fire-Axe, she answers sharply. *"Has the month addled your brain? Your master has made a deal with the Fire-Axe. Mighty Sakkarot will give you the core of an army. You will build your horde as you see fit and by winter's start, you will invade the Vale of Valtaerna and slaughter the Mitran Order of St. Macarius to a man."*

Resistance or refusal to go is met with scowling disapproval. *"Are you mad?! You are bound to the master by the Pact of Thorns. Disobey and you can only imagine what he will do to you. Now prepare yourself to leave and I may forget this impudence!"*

But what if the PCs do defy Thorn? It's not completely beyond imagination. After all, by this time the PCs are powerful. Tenth level offers great might. They may chafe at continuing to be under Thorn's thumb. They may have their own plans for Talingarde.

Thorn is furious if they have killed Thrane or failed to deliver the Tears. That prompts violent reaction as the Cardinal dispatches Tiadora leading all nine of his erinyes servitors -- The Nine Sisters. Altogether that is a CR 16 squad of devils hunting the PCs. They can teleport and if the PCs still possess the *iron circlets* they know exactly where they are. Defeat is almost inevitable.

If the Tears can be retrieved, Thorn does not kill them. He has them dragged before him on his iron throne in the Agathium (detailed in Book V). *"You think you can defy me?!"* he howls. *"You are mine! Your souls are mine! You are bound to me and you will do my bidding! Thrane was a useful tool you have taken away from me. That briefly inconveniences my plans. That pains me! I do not wish to suffer alone. Tiadora give them something to remember this lesson."* Tiadora and the Nine Sisters 'gentle' attentions permanently cost each PC one ability point.

If they are merely obstinate, Thorn himself may make an appearance in Ghastenhall. Thorn's full statistics are in Book V but suffice to say that he has grown only more powerful since he first recruited the Ninth. What exactly Thorn says to the PCs depends on what they've done. But the gist is always the same. *"I am your master! You will obey! Do as I command and you will be rewarded. Defy me and you will beg for death before I am done with you."*

In the end the PCs have no choice but to obey. This resentment is not a bad thing. Subtly encourage it. But also encourage the PCs to be subtle in their disobedience. The time is not yet right. Thorn has many distractions. He is not scrying the PCs as frequently as he once did. A subtle plot could escape his notice. Also, the PCs are finally high enough level to have a reasonable chance to notice that the *iron circlets* are not solely beneficial devices. If they do this without being noticed, reward them.

Story Award: Learning that Thorn scries them using the circlets without being discovered – CR 10 (9600 XP).

Even if quarrelsome, Thorn still sends them on this mission. Who else does he have to send? Tiadora and the Nine Sisters are powerful but will never defeat Ara Mathra (see Act V) in his Cathedral. Sakkarot is mighty but not at all subtle. He will never penetrate the labyrinth in the Garden of Serenity (see Act IV). By this time the Third, Fourth and Seventh knots are destroyed. Thorn intends Tiadora to recruit replacements but time is short! New recruits will never be ready in time. He needs the Ninth and he needs them now.

Tiadora (Handmaiden Devil) CR 14

XP 38,400

hp 187 (see the Devil, Handmaiden entry in the Bestiary 2)

TACTICS

During Combat Tiadora realizes that the PCs are no longer to be trifled with. She pulls no punches and uses every power at her disposal. Tiadora or the Nine Sisters however are not able to summon any more devils to aid them.

Morale Without her master present, Tiadora will not fight to the death. If a battle goes poorly, she flees.

The Nine Sisters (erinyes) CR 8

XP 4,800

hp 94 (see the Devil, Erinyes entry in the Bestiary)

Event Two:
An Audience with the Fire-Axe

The Castle Westkirk is a burned out ruin decorated with the grisly remains of its former lords. Everywhere bugbears are camped, gleeful and bedecked with stolen loot. Mad giggling goblins scamper underfoot. Bigger more fearsome creatures command prime real estate with the conquered fortress. What is certain is that this place is packed with the horde of Sakkarot Fire-Axe.

Supplies are plentiful and crude efforts have been made to fix the break in the walls made by the great giant-tossed stones. Still, the Castle is only a wrecked shade of its former glory.

As soon as Tiadora arrives she is no longer in human form. Instead, Tiadora takes on the shape of a female white-furred bugbear garbed in a spike and skull-adorned leather harness bearing the icon of a great axe wreathed in flame. Every bugbear she passes eyes her intensely but seems unwilling to meet her gaze.

She says nothing, proceeding directly to the Fire-Axe's conquered throne. Sitting upon the Throne of Westkirk, clad in fine but ill-fitting armor still wielding his infernal weapon is the Fire-Axe himself. He stands and growls at the white bugbear with a low provocative roar. She smiles and growls back.

"Did you miss me, dearest?"

The Fire-Axe then notices her companions. *"You've brought friends... old friends! Welcome! Behold, my warriors, it was these vicious killers who slaughtered the guards of Balentyne and opened the gates for us to raid the south. It was they who brought us steel! They are my honored guests and I will feast upon the heart of any who does not treat them well!"*

Fire-Axe's introduction earns the PCs a bestial cheer. Mostly the throng of bugbears and other brutes in the great hall are eager to return to their feasting, drinking and gambling. They care little about visitors.

"We have much to discuss. Join me in my war-room." The Fire-Axe stands and is followed by a dozen elite bugbear lieutenants into a side chamber. The side chamber has a great table covered in maps. In one corner of the room, a man tied to a chair is having hot coals applied to the soles of his feet by two bugbear thugs.

"What are you doing?! Torture is to be done in the dungeon!" Fire-Axe demands.

"It's full, my lord!" the thugs protest.

"Imbeciles! Make room for the Baron and get him out of sight!" The Fire-Axe shakes his head as they two underlings scamper off with the still whimpering Baron of Westkirk. *"Good help is so hard to find."*

"Take a seat," Sakkarot says taking the chair at the head of the table. *"He points to one of his more junior lieutenants. Bring us some of that good brandy we looted from Lorringsgate. Now!"* he barks. The bugbear is off like a shot and soon returns with a large cask of liquor.

"It's good to see you," Sakkarot says to the PCs. *"I've been hearing a lot about your exploits from Tiadora here. I'm glad I'm not the only one fighting this war."*

The Fire-Axe makes a little small talk if the PCs care to engage him. Sakkarot is not a brute. He plays the part in front of his horde, but in the war room he repeatedly reveals himself as intelligent and well-spoken. His lieutenants say nothing only listening attentively to their warlord.

"You know why we're here," says Tiadora.

"Of course I know why you're here. You want to steal my army."

"We want to use a small part of it for a special mission. If Valtaerna could be sacked, the king's army will be denied those clerics. It will be..."

Sakkarot interrupts Tiadora. *"Yes, yes, I've heard your pitch. With the Vale destroyed the king's army will be weakened and we will fare better against them when we push towards Daveryn in the spring. I've already agreed to lend my friends here in the Ninth Knot Hekkarth's Head-Takers. That's a hundred fine warriors!"*

Tiadora nods. *"We want more than that. Cardinal Thorn also commands that Shagoroth Night-Mane and his retinue be given to their command!"*

"What?! That's another hundred and fifty warriors! What am I supposed to make war with come spring?"

"You will command more than ten times that number and more reinforcements are due from the North. By the spring your horde, mighty Sakkarot, will be greater than ever before."

"Half of your promised reinforcements never arrive! You cannot have the Night-Mane. I need him."

Now the PCs have a chance to speak on their own behalf. In truth, Sakkarot will do as he is ordered, but he is not pleased about this imposition. He is tired of taking orders from Tiadora. He owes his loyalty to Cardinal Thorn and Asmodeus, not this sarcastic devil-wench who seems to think that she is his master. What Sakkarot wants to hear is that the PCs really need these troops from the Ninth Knot itself.

A successful DC 20 Diplomacy or Bluff skill check or some decent roleplaying will accomplish this. Sakkarot owes much of his success to our band of villains. In the end he almost certainly aids them.

"Fine," he grumbles. *"Night-mane as well. I'll help more than that. There are duergar beneath the mountains not far from here. My wolf-riders report evidence of them. But I have never been able to make contact with them. They seem uninterested in allying with us. Maybe they'll ally with you. They certainly have no love for Talingarde."*

Tiadora nods. *"An interesting lead. I have one of my own. There is a medusa living in an abandoned temple not far from Valtaerna. She is a legendary monster and though knights of Talingarde have attempted to kill her many times, she has always survived. Her name is Izevel and she may be convinced to aid you."*

"Hah! She'll more likely decorate her parlor with your statues" says Sakkarot with a hearty laugh. *"What could such a horror possibly want from us?"*

"I cannot say," answers Tiadora with a shrug. *"That is for the Ninth Knot to discover."*

"I hadn't realized you were so desperate. If that's the case then I have another one for you. Amongst the many fine reinforcements that Tiadora has gathered for me, one is an oni named Raiju the Exile. He is a beast! He slew the son of a chieftain and its just a matter of time before my killers manage to corner him. He's yours if you want him."

To sum up – the PCs are given three leads from this meeting: the duergar, Izevel the medusa and the oni Raiju. They may already have leads of their own. The vampire prince in Ghastenhall is a potential ally. They can bolster the ranks with their own minions. And they may have allies from other books still alive and with them like Grumblejack, Artephius the alchemical golem, and Trik.

The PCs can stay and chat with the Fire-Axe as long as they wish, but nothing more of any substance is said. The bugbears will meet them at the vale at the beginning of winter three months from today.

As the meeting concludes, the Fire-Axe rises, *"This reunion has been fun but I've got a fall campaign to plan. This country doesn't burn itself you know."*

The meeting is over. Tiadora returns with them to Ghastenhall, makes sure they are clear on their mission and then departs. It is now time to build their army.

Story Award: Award a CR 10 (9,600 XP) reward for good roleplaying and 5 VP for gaining Sakkarot's aid.

Event Three: The Exile

Before our band of villains leaves the Fire-Axe's camp, the PCs can seek out Raiju the Exile. Finding Raiju is not trivial. The ogre mage claims a small chamber of the Castle Westkirk and lurks invisible there expecting that he will soon be hunted by relatives of the slain bugbear princeling. Smarter and sneakier than your average ogre mage, Raiju knows he's made enemies and is not going down without a fight.

Raiju's invisibility grants him the usual +40 Stealth bonus though spells like *see invisibility* can erase this advantage. What will convince him to reveal himself is a success Diplomacy skill check (DC 20). Award a +4 bonus to this role if the PCs specifically mention his plight and reveal they will take him away from the Castle Westkirk. Promises of financial reward may also grant bonuses depending on what they are. Raiju is not only desperate – he remains greedy as well.

If the PCs can find him and convince him to listen, the ogre mage is not unreasonable. He is eager enough to leave this place. Raiju is not a devotee of Asmodeus (and is in fact not particularly religious) but does respect the power of the devil-god. He has no problem working for the deity's interests and is eager to be a part of the raid against the Vale of Valtaerna.

He balks at elaborate oaths or contracts. He knows their power and knows they can be entangling. Just because he is lawful evil does not mean he is enthusiastic to bind himself to the service of others. Instead, he is willing to be hired as a bodyguard. He will work for either a half share of any treasure accumulated or a promise of 250 gp a month.

Once hired, Raiju reveals himself and swears his service to his new masters. Raiju is a cheerful and gregarious monster full of stories and tales from exotic lands. He loves strong drink and wine or spirits of any sort bring out the natural storyteller in him. He has seen many wonders and loves to tell tales of dubious authenticity about where he has travelled. Of course half of these stories are pure invention. Raiju is a notorious liar.

What is true is that if asked, Raiju will reveal how he came to be in this far land. In his distant homeland, Raiju served as an assassin for a powerful wizard. He did a fine trade in slaughtering disobedient underlings and dealing with rebellious lords. Finally, Raiju slew the wrong person. He was sent into a castle and told to slay the lord of that castle who would be dressed all in white. Instead of the lord he slew an imperial ambassador (also dressed all in white). Furious, the wizard turned on Raiju and the oni has been on the run ever since.

Raiju the Exile, Ogre Mage CR 8

XP 4,800

LE Large outsider (giant, native, oni, shapechanger)

Init +7; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; Perception +13

DEFENSE

AC 21, touch 12, flat-footed 18 (+4 armor,+3 Dex,+5 natural, –1 size)
hp 92 (8d10+48); regeneration 5 (fire or acid)
Fort +12, **Ref** +5, **Will** +10
SR 19

OFFENSE

Speed 40 ft., fly 60 ft. (good)
Melee greatsword +14/+9 (3d6+10)
Ranged composite longbow +10 (2d6+7)
Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft.
Spell-Like Abilities (CL 9th)
Constant—*fly*
At will—*darkness*, *invisibility*
1/day—*charm monster* (DC 17), *cone of cold* (DC 18), *gaseous form*, *deep slumber* (DC 16)

TACTICS

During Combat Raiju loves the thrill of battle and is eager to engage foes with his greatsword, attacking with surprise from invisibility if possible. He also uses his *cone of cold* to break up groups of enemies. If ever surrounded or in grave danger, he is quick to use *fly*, *invisibility* and *gaseous form* to escape.
Morale Raiju is never going to be a fanatic follower of our villain's cause. He turns into gaseous forms and attempts to flee if reduced to 23 hit points or less.

STATISTICS

Str 24, **Dex** 16, **Con** 23, **Int** 16, **Wis** 14, **Cha** 16
Base Atk +8; **CMB** +16; **CMD** 29
Feats Combat Expertise, Combat Reflexes, Improved Initiative, Iron Will
Skills Bluff +14, Disguise +14, Fly +5, Intimidate +14, Knowledge (arcana) +14, Perception +13, Sense Motive +13, Spellcraft +14, Stealth +14,Use Magic Device +14
Languages Common, Giant, Goblin
SQ change shape (Small, Medium, or Large humanoid; *alter self* or *giant form I*), flight
Gear large masterwork greatsword, large composite longbow, 50 arrows, chain shirt, silk clothing, sandals, 120 gp, cask of looted rye beer

That was years ago. It is likely that Raiju alone remembers the incident. But it matters not. Raiju now relishes the life of a wanderer. He sometimes calls himself Raiju the Ryuukei or Raiju the Ronin, titles that no doubt have great meaning in whatever strange land he hails from, but leave his comrades here puzzled. Still, his wanderlust did not keep him from joining the Fire-Axe. His only regret to leaving Westkirk is that he will no longer be serving with Sakkarot, a great lord he has come to respect.

When he arrived months ago, he heard that Sakkarot was building an army to raid the south. Raiju joined expecting the alliance would be short-lived. He had planned to use the army only to infiltrate the south when the horde was destroyed. Since then he has seen the Fire-Axe win victory after victory. Now he calls the Fire-Axe as Sakkarot-sama, a title of respect. Sakkarot is so far the only being in Talingarde who has earned this title.

Story Award: Award a CR 8 (4,800 XP) reward for recruiting Raiju.

Event Four: An Unexpected Visitor

After the meeting with Sakkarot is concluded, the PCs return to Ghastenhall to Crowley Estate to plot their next move. Shortly after their return, they receive an unexpected visitor. Exactly when Dessiter chooses to visit is up to the GM. Dessiter waits until he is sure Tiadora is gone but before the PCs again depart Ghastenhall. He doesn't want to be seen as an intruder, but neither does he wish to delay this initial meeting.

So, who is Dessiter?

Despite presenting himself as the master of all things diabolic, Cardinal Thorn is actually only one of the instruments of Hell that havs taken an interest in Talingarde. With the claiming of the *Tears of Achlys* and their previous successes, the PCs have gained the attention of another influential actor. Dessiter is a contract devil who has been operating upon the prime material for some time. He is the consummate corrupter and a soul-collector par excellence, but that is not the reason for his visit. The PCs scarcely need further corruption. No, Dessiter is here because he has begun to suspect that Cardinal Thorn may not be the perfect tool of Hell he once seemed. Dessiter is scouting out potential talent to replace him. And thus he visits our cadre of villains at the Crowley Estate.

He appears with no introduction. From a cloud of brimstone and sulfurous smoke, he appears and bows. Dessiter's speech is always polite, formal and even effusive. He introduces himself, *"Great and powerful masters of darkness, behold your servant Dessiter of the Phistophilus. I have only just received word of your great victories and I come on behalf of the Lord of the Ninth Circle to personally congratulate you. But more than that, I bring counsel if this assembly of great lords will deign to hear it."*

Our villains are likely suspicious of Dessiter and of course they have every right to be. Why would a devil of all things come to their aid unbidden? Dessiter is quick to answer those concerns with a dismissive wave. *"You fight for the Prince of Hell. Did you think you would not receive aid?"*

So, what counsel does Dessiter offer? *"You build an army to storm the Vale of Valtaerna – truly a noble undertaking, but know that the Vale is guarded by more than mortal guardians. Agents of the celestial realm infest that Vale and you will have need to defeat them all if Valtaerna is to be taken. There is a mortal master to the Order of St. Macarius, but he is only a figurehead. The true master of the Order is undying and eternal -- an angel named Ara Mathra. He is your ultimate enemy and until he is defeated, your mission can only be deemed incomplete."*

"Alas, little is known of the interior of the Vale, my lords. It has been long since any who serve the Dark Prince has managed to infiltrate that stronghold of light. But this much is known. Defeating the mortal army stationed there will only the beginning of your struggle. Just as the Lord of Light wears three faces, so do three eternal flames burn within the Vale. As long as those divine fires burn, the Shining Lord's connection to the Vale will be too powerful for any mortal to overcome. Extinguish the flames and you extinguish your enemies' ability to resist you."

That is all the information Dessiter has to convey. Honestly, it is not much. That much information could be obtained by questioning prisoners captured in the Battle of Saintsbridge (see Act Three). Still, Dessiter acts as if these are great revelations. He is interested to see what revealing this information will cause the PCs to disclose to him. What is their plan? How will they destroy the Vale?

In the end, this is a roleplaying opportunity. If Dessiter can be persuaded that the PCs have a real chance of succeeding on this raid, he decides to aid them. He will strike up an infernal contract with them, transforming the three hellhounds (from Book 2) into Nessian Warhounds of terrible power. If the hellhounds have been slain, at the GM's discretion, they could still receive the Warhounds. All that Dessiter requires is that they swear to slay Ara Mathra or at least drive the celestial from this plane of existence before they depart the Vale of Valtaerna. Dessiter's true purpose here is to evaluate the PCs and get them under contract so he scry upon them. This way he will ready if it is ever necessary to depose Thorn (see Book V).

Dessiter as Foreshadowing

So what purpose does Dessiter's visit ultimately serve in this adventure? Well, if our villains can impress him as competent and powerful, he will ensure that they go into the battle of Saintsbridge with three Nessian Hellhounds at their command. Commanding gigantic flaming hellspawn is a great way to emphasize to your players that there is something really different about this campaign than their typical adventure path.

But really that's just window dressing. The real purpose of this encounter is to make sure that your PCs remember who Dessiter is. In the not too distant future, they are going to need infernal legal advice to wiggle out of the Pact of Thorns before they slay Cardinal Thorn in Book V and become masters of the Nine Knots. By introducing Dessiter here at the campaign midpoint we are setting him up as a major plot point later in the game. This encounter is all about foreshadowing key events yet to come.

Dessiter of the Phistophilus CR 10

XP 9,600

LE Medium outsider (devil, evil, extraplanar, lawful)

Init +11; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., see in darkness; Perception +26

DEFENSE

AC 25, touch 18, flat-footed 17 (+7 Dex, +1 dodge, +7 natural)

hp 136 (13d10+65)

Fort +9, **Ref** +15, **Will** +16

DR 10/good; **Immune** fire, mind-affecting effects, poison; **Resist** acid 10, cold 10; **SR** 21

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.

Melee binding contract (whip) +20/+15/+10 (1d4+7 plus bleed), gore +11 (2d6+3)

Space 5 ft.; **Reach** 5 ft. (10 ft. with binding contract)

Special Attacks binding contract, bleed (1d6), impale (2d8+4)

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 13th; concentration +19)

Constant—*tongues*

At will—*bestow curse* (DC 20), *detect thoughts* (DC 18), *dimension door*, *erase*, *identify*, *major image* (DC 19), *produce flame*, *sending*

3/day—*arcane eye*, *break enchantment*, *greater teleport* (self plus 50 lbs. of objects only), *hold person* (DC 18), *locate creature*, *mage's private sanctum*, *scorching ray*, *silence* (DC 18), *vision*

1/day—*contact other plane*, *delayed blast fireball* (DC 23), *dismissal* (DC 21), *plane shift* (DC 23), summon (level 4, 1d6 bearded devils or 1 bone devil 50%), *symbol of pain* (DC 21)

TACTICS

During Combat Dessiter is not here to fight and if attacked will try to flee. He is vindictive however and will become a perennial thorn in the villain's side.

Morale Dessiter flees from any fight. If forced to fight, he does viciously and without pity. He will surrender if brought to 34 hit points or lower and beg for his life.

STATISTICS

Str 17, Dex 25, Con 20, Int 24, Wis 23, Cha 22

Base Atk +13; CMB +16; CMD 34

Feats Alertness, Deceitful, Dodge, Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Mobility, Persuasive

Skills Bluff +26, Diplomacy +26, Disguise +8, Intimidate +26, Knowledge (arcana) +23, Knowledge (nobility) +23, Knowledge (planes) +23, Knowledge (religion) +23, Linguistics +20, Perception +26, Profession (scribe) +19, Sense Motive +26, Sleight of Hand +20, Spellcraft +20

Languages Abyssal, Aklo, Aquan, Auran, Celestial, Common, Draconic, Dwarven, Elven, Giant, Gnome, Goblin, Gnoll, Halfling, Ignan, Infernal, Orc, Sylvan, Terran, Undercommon; telepathy 100 ft., tongues

SQ infernal contract, infernal investment

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Binding Contract (Su) All contract devils carry numerous lengthy contracts draped over their horns or within their numerous carrying cases. They can wield these contracts like whips, but deal lethal damage regardless of the armor bonus of their target. A contract devil modifies attack and damage rolls when using a binding contract by its Intelligence modifier, not its Strength modifier (this equates to a +7 bonus for most contract devils). Wounds created by a binding contract resemble horrifically deep paper cuts and cause 1d6 points of bleed damage. A contract devil can use its binding contract to disarm and trip foes as if the contract were a whip. If it is itself disarmed of the contract, the devil can rearm itself with a new contract as an immediate action.

Impale (Ex) As a swift action, a contract devil can impale an opponent grappled by its binding contract, dealing 2d8+4 points of piercing damage.

Infernal Contract (Su) As a full-round action, a contract devil can produce an infernal contract for a single living mortal creature. This contract can grant a wide range of abilities and effects. To receive any of these bonuses, however, the mortal must sign its true name to the document of its own free will. Upon doing so, that mortal's soul is sworn to the contract devil, condemning the soul to an eternity of servitude in Hell rather than whatever fate would naturally befall it upon the mortal's death. Breaking a contract with a contract devil is difficult and dangerous; as long as the infernal contract remains in effect, the victim cannot be restored to life after death save by a *miracle* or a *wish*. If a mortal is restored to life in this way, the contract devil immediately senses the development—it not only knows which soul has been restored to life, but also gains the benefits of a *discern location* spell targeted on the character or creature that restored the damned soul to life.

Infernal Investment (Su) As a subclause of all infernal contracts, a contract devil can use *greater scrying* at will upon any creature it has a contract with. The target creature always fails its save against the devil's *scrying* attempt—this ability otherwise functions at caster level 20th.

The Hounds of Hell

Once a contract has been agreed upon, Dessiter is swift in completing his part of the bargain. With a flash of balefire, the hellhounds are infused with the primal might of the palace of the Dark Prince – Nessus itself. They are reborn as Nessian Warhounds. These large creatures of pure darkness are terrifying to behold. As large as horses, they burn with an unquenchable fire. They will be of great use in the battle to come.

With the contract in hand and his reconnaissance completed, Dessiter will depart. He bows and once more congratulates the PCs. *"I have no doubt we will meet again once other victories have been won."*

Dessiter answers no further questions. Or rather he answers them, he just doesn't say anything of any real use. He answers questions with something similar to: *"Ah, a wise question, O great one. The question itself reveals your great intellect. While it is true that there is much to be known on that matter, I believe that you have already all you need to answer it yourself and there is little that your humble servant could add that to that great store."*

If anyone mentions Tiadora in front of Dessiter, he only smiles. *"Ah, you are acquainted with my dear sister. Be sure to convey my greetings when next you see her."*

Story Award: Award a CR 12 reward (19,200 XP) for good roleplay and signing a contract for the hellhounds.

Nessian Warhounds (3) CR 9

XP 6,400 each (19,200 XP total)

LE Large outsider (evil, extraplanar, fire, lawful)

Init +6; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., scent; Perception +12

DEFENSE

AC 24, touch 11, flat-footed 22 (+6 armor, +2 Dex, +7 natural, –1 size)

hp 126 (12d10+60)

Fort +13, **Ref** +10, **Will** +5

Immune fire

Weaknesses vulnerability to cold

OFFENSE

Speed 40 ft.

Melee bite +20 (2d6+12/19–20 plus 2d6 fire)

Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft.

Special Attacks breath weapon (30-ft. cone, once every 1d4 rounds, 10d6 fire damage, Reflex DC 21 half)

TACTICS

During Combat These massive hounds of hell are not sophisticated combatants. They breathe fire as often as they can and otherwise charge into battle, utilizing their savage bite. They can be dangerous allies when fighting alongside those who are not immune to fire. Having a 4 Intelligence score, the Warhounds are quick to forget that mortal allies are not impervious to flame.

Morale These monstrous hounds of hell fight to the death at their master's call.

STATISTICS

Str 27, **Dex** 15, **Con** 21, **Int** 4, **Wis** 12, **Cha** 6

Base Atk +12; CMB +21; CMD 33 (37 vs. trip)

Feats Alertness, Improved Critical (bite), Improved Initiative, Skill Focus (Stealth, Survival), Weapon Focus (bite)

Skills Acrobatics +16, Perception +12, Stealth +21, Survival +13; Racial Modifiers +5 Stealth

Languages Infernal

Event Five:
Shadows Under Ghastenhall

The vampire prince Gaius Vestromo has been a fixture of Ghastenhall for so long that many believe him only a legend. For five hundred and forty years, Prince Gaius has dwelt in this city. No one knows it like the Prince. No one understands the city like this lord of the undead. And no one is more entrenched in its culture and its folklore.

Every native of Ghastenhall has heard the tale of the wicked Prince Gaius who was cursed to undeath and lurks in the shadows under the city. Prince Gaius is a preferred bogey-man. Stories about Prince Gaius always end the same way – behave, keep to the good parts of the city and avoid strong drink and loose women or Prince Gaius will eat you.

These spook stories, though framed in the form of children's tale, are surprisingly factual. Prince Gaius and his spawn almost exclusively focus their feeding upon the criminal, the vagrant, the drunk and prostitutes. This is not because the vampire and his brood have any sort of strong moral conviction. They hunt those sorts because they are not often missed.

Over the years, Prince Gaius has made it his business to learn specifics about every major criminal enterprise in Ghastenhall. He knows every crime boss and gang leader very well and he uses this information to ensure his own and his brood's safety.

For their part, prudent crime lords often turn a blind eye when Prince Gaius snatches someone unimportant. There is even a term for this in Ghastenhall crime circles – 'the blood tax'. If you don't pay your 'blood tax' and try to make war on old Prince Gaius, everyone knows that the next disappearance could well be you.

This is not to say that Gaius operates openly. Far from it. Since the rise of the House of Darius eighty years ago, Prince Gaius has taken exceptional pains to remain out of sight. So far, the prince has succeeded admirably. No one in authority believes the rumors of a vampire in the old Barcan cemetery of the Lord's Quarter. And if a drunken sailor, prostitute or vagrant occassionally disappears, what does that prove?

In his own way, Gaius Vestromo is a valuable city asset. While Prince Gaius despises the Darian regime, he has a great fondness for the city of Ghastenhall. He was, when mortal, a close relative of the original House of Ghasten that founded the city so many centuries ago. In his veins flows the blood of Barcan nobility and he would see the city thrive if only so that there are greater herds forom which to feed.

If Prince Gaius knew about the eventual release of the *Tears of Achlys* he would slay our villains now. But he would also see the undead hating Church of Mitra burned to the ground and slaughtered to a man. Thus Prince Gaius is potentially an enemy or an ally depending on how the PCs approach him.

Finding the Prince should not be difficult for the PCs. He keeps his court in the mausoleum of House Vestromo in the Old Barcan cemetery. He only rarely leaves, dispatching his spawn to prey upon the dregs of the city and, to replenish their numbers by bringing him a new 'recruit' to be infected. If the PCs are so brazen to enter the cemetery at night, he will notice them. He will use his magic to sense that they are not devotees of Mitra and so, rather than melt into the sewers of the city and disappear, he might allow a meeting.

His first impulse is to slaughter them and feast upon their blood. Rarely does dinner simply stroll into his court. But he enjoys entertainment before dinner. He'll listen to what they have to say. If they are rude or bumbling the Prince and his eleven spawn attack. But if the PCs approach him politely and present him with a workable plan to destroy the Vale of Valtaerna thereby permanently weakening the Church of Mitra, he is intrigued.

Prince Gaius could help. He could send ten vampire spawn to aid in the assault. Though numerically small, this elite strike force of vampires could wreak a terrible toll upon the battlefield. The spawn would certainly be no match for the archons and priests of the army, but against the normal foot troops, they would unstoppable. Their fast healing and damage reduction ensures that normal soldiery would be almost completely ineffectual and the sight of ten vampires feeding upon the fallen would put many superstitious warriors of Talingarde to flight.

The Prince will not give his aid for nothing. Prince Gaius is afflicted. Over the centuries, his blood has grown thin. He can no longer make true vampires -- only vampire spawn. Any spawn he releases from his service sickens and dies. Within the Vault of Saint Angelo within the Cathedral of Mitra Made Manifest (see Act V) is held a family relic of his clan stolen long ago by the hated priest of Mitra – *the Chalice of Aurelius Vestromo*. It was this chalice that brought vampirism into his bloodline so many centuries ago. With the Chalice, Prince Gaius' power would grow substantially and he would once more be able to make true vampires instead of mere vampire spawn. He desires it above all else and for a blood oath to recover it would send aid.

Story Award: Award a CR 11 (12,800 XP) and 3 VP for allying with Prince Gaius.

Prince Gaius Vestromo, Vampire Prince of Ghastenhall CR 12

XP 19,200

Male human vampire aristocrat 1/sorcerer 10
NE Medium undead (augmented humanoid)
Init +8; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +18

DEFENSE

AC 28, touch 18, flat-footed 23 (+4 armor, +3 deflection, +4 Dex, +1 dodge, +6 natural)
hp 141 (11 HD; 1d8+10d6+102); fast healing 5
Fort +11, **Ref** +11, **Will** +15
Defensive Abilities channel resistance +4, DR 10/magic and silver; Immune undead traits, Resist cold 10, electricity 10
Weaknesses vampire weaknesses

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.
Melee slam +8 (1d4+4 plus energy drain)
Special Attacks blood drain, children of the night, create spawn, dominate (DC 21), energy drain (2 levels, DC 21)

Sorcerer Spells Known (CL 10th; concentration +16)
5th (4/day)—*hold monster* (DC 23)
4th (6/day)—*crushing despair* (DC 22), *dimension door*, *phantasmal killer* (DC 20)
3rd (7/day)—*blink*, *deep slumber* (DC 21), *dispel magic*, *lightning bolt*, *suggestion* (DC 21)
2nd (8/day)—*acid arrow*, *false life*, *glitterdust* (DC 18), *hideous laughter* (DC 20), *invisibility*
1st (8/day)—*charm person* (DC 19), *disguise self*, *expeditious retreat*, *mage armor*, *magic missile*, *ray of enfeeblement* (DC 17)
0 (at will)—*acid splash*, *bleed* (DC 16), *daze* (DC 18), *detect magic*, *ghost sound* (DC 16), *mage hand*, *message*, *read magic*, *resistance*
Bloodline Arcane

TACTICS

Before Combat Prince Gaius casts *extended false life* and *mage armor* on himself every evening.
During Combat Prince Gaius casts *blink* and tries to avoid direct combat while his spawn engage enemies. He prefers to use *hold person*, *dominate* and *suggestion* to neutralize enemies and perhaps even turn them into allies. He resorts to loud noisy spells like lightning bolt only if forced.
Morale Prince Gaius is a coward and is quick to retreat from challenging fights. If ever reduced to half hit points (70 hit points or fewer) he flees, casting quickened *dimension door* with his metamagic adept power to escape.

STATISTICS

Str 16, **Dex** 18, **Con** —, **Int** 16, **Wis** 15, **Cha** 23
Base Atk +5; **CMB** +8; **CMD** 25
Feats Alertness[B], Combat Casting, Combat Reflexes[B], Craft Wand, Dodge[B], Eschew Materials, Extend Spell, Greater Spell Focus (enchantment), Improved Initiative[B], Iron Will, Lightning Reflexes[B], Quicken Spell, Spell Focus (enchantment), Spell Penetration, Toughness[B]
Skills Bluff +20, Diplomacy +20, Fly +10, Intimidate +20, Knowledge (arcana) +15, Knowledge (local) +17, Knowledge (nobility) +11, Perception +18, Sense Motive +18, Spellcraft +14, Stealth +12
Languages Common, Draconic, Infernal, Old Talirean (dead language)
SQ arcane bond (signet ring), bloodline arcana, change shape (dire bat or wolf, *beast shape* II), gaseous form, mastermind (44 HD, telepathy), metamagic adept (2/day), new arcana, shadowless, spider climb
Combat Gear *wand of web* (15 charges), *wand of magic missile* (CL 7th, 25 charges); **Other Gear** *cloak of resistance* +2, Vestromo family signet ring (a *ring of protection* +3 and his arcane bond), jewelry worth 550 gp, outdated noble's outfit, keys to the mausoleum

Blood Drain (Su) A vampire can suck blood from a grappled opponent; if the vampire establishes or maintains a pin, it drains blood, dealing 1d4 points of Constitution damage. The vampire heals 5 hit points or gains 5 temporary hit points for 1 hour (up to a maximum number of temporary hit points equal to its full normal hit points) each round it drains blood.
Change Shape (Su) A vampire can use change shape to assume the form of a dire bat or wolf, as *beast shape* II.
Children of the Night (Su) Once per day, a vampire can call forth 1d6+1 rat swarms, 1d4+1 bat swarms, or 2d6 wolves as a standard action. These creatures arrive in 2d6 rounds and serve the vampire for up to 1 hour.
Create Spawn (Su) A vampire can create spawn out of those it slays with blood drain or energy drain, provided that the slain creature is of the same creature type as the vampire's base creature type. The victim rises from death as a vampire in 1d4 days. This vampire is under the command of the vampire that created it, and remains enslaved until its master's destruction. A vampire may have enslaved spawn totaling no more than twice its own Hit Dice; any spawn it creates that would exceed this limit become free-willed undead. A vampire may free an enslaved spawn in order to enslave a new spawn, but once freed, a vampire or vampire spawn cannot be enslaved again.
Dominate (Su) A vampire can crush a humanoid opponent's will as a standard action. Anyone the vampire targets must succeed on a Will save or fall instantly under the vampire's influence, as though by a *dominate person* spell (caster level 12th). The ability has a range of 30 feet.
Energy Drain (Su) A creature hit by a vampire's slam (or other natural weapon) gains two negative levels. This ability only triggers once per round, regardless of the number of attacks a vampire makes.
Gaseous Form (Su) As a standard action, a vampire can assume *gaseous form* at will (caster level 5th), but it can remain gaseous indefinitely and has a fly speed of 20 feet with perfect maneuverability.
Mastermind (Su) Prince Gaius can have a number of enslaved spawn totaling four times his total Hit Dice. In addition, Prince Gaius has the telepathy ability, and can communicate telepathically with his spawn. Prince Gaius may exercise or end his use of this ability as a standard action and maintain his connection to the spawn for as long as he wishes. He may only use this ability with one spawn at a time. While using this ability, Prince Gaius enters a catatonic state similar to his daily rest and is treated as helpless, though he is alert to any jarring noises, the presence of any visible creature within 5 feet, or any damage that befalls his body.
Shadowless (Ex) A vampire casts no shadows and shows no reflection in a mirror.
Spider Climb (Ex) A vampire can climb sheer surfaces as though under the effects of a *spider climb* spell.
Weaknesses Prince Gaius is an old vampire and so is not as susceptible to some traditional vampire weaknesses. He is not repelled by garlic and immersion in running water does nothing. Only holy symbols of Mitra repel him. He laughs at the holy symbols of other gods (in particulary evil gods like Asmodeus).

Likewise, at one time or another, Prince Gaius has been invited into virtually every prominent home in the city of Ghastenhall. Stakes through the heart still immobilze Prince Gaius. Exposure to sunlight still hurts the prince and staggers him. However he is not automatically destroyed upon the second round of exposure. Instead Prince Gaius takes 3d10 points of fire damage every round after the first he is exposed to direct sunlight. His damage reduction and fast healing do nothing to reduce or heal this damage.

Note: Though Prince Gaius Vestromo keeps court in the Vestromo mausoleum, that is not where he keeps his coffin. He sleeps in a hidden chamber within the sewer accessible only by those in gaseous form. If located, Gaius' stronghold is filled with treasures of both the Vestromo family and heirlooms of the House of Ghasten. Duke Hadrian would pay 15,000 gp for these lost relics of his past.

Vampire Spawn of Prince Gaius (11) CR 4

XP 1,200 each (13,200 XP total)

LE Medium undead

Init +1; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +11

DEFENSE

AC 15, touch 11, flat-footed 14 (+1 Dex, +4 natural)

hp 26 (4d8+8); fast healing 2

Fort +3, **Ref** +2, **Will** +5

Defensive Abilities channel resistance +2; **DR** 5/silver; **Immune** undead traits; **Resist** cold 10, electricity 10

Weaknesses resurrection vulnerability, vampire weaknesses

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.

Melee slam +4 (1d4+1 plus energy drain)

Space 5 ft.; **Reach** 5 ft.

Special Attacks blood drain, dominate (DC 14), energy drain (1 level, DC 14)

TACTICS

During Combat Furious and always ravenous for blood, these undead attack in mass, trying to dominate or grapple their foes. Once grappled, they are quick to drain their blood. If they cannot use this advantage then they use their slam attack hoping to weaken their foe enough to allow feeding.

Morale Deep within the thrall of their master, Prince Gaius, these spawn will fight to the death to defend him. Otherwise, they flee if reduced to 7 hit points or less.

STATISTICS

Str 12, **Dex** 12, **Con** -, **Int** 11, **Wis** 13, **Cha** 15

Base Atk +3; **CMB** +4; **CMD** 15

Feats Blind-Fight, Skill Focus (Perception)

Skills Intimidate +2, Knowledge (religion) +7, Perception +11, Stealth +16; **Racial Modifier** +8 Stealth

Languages Common

SQ gaseous form, shadowless, spider climb

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Blood Drain (Su) A vampire spawn can suck blood from a grappled opponent; if the vampire spawn establishes or maintains a pin, it drains blood, dealing 1d4 points of Constitution damage. The vampire spawn heals 5 hit points or gains 5 temporary hit points for 1 hour (up to a maximum number of temporary hit points equal to its full normal hit points) each round it drains blood.

Dominate (Su) A vampire spawn can crush a humanoid opponent's will as a standard action. Anyone the vampire spawn targets must succeed on a Will save (DC 14) or fall instantly under the vampire spawn's influence, as though by a *dominate person* spell (caster level 12th). The ability has a range of 30 feet.

Energy Drain (Su) A creature hit by a vampire spawn's slam (or other natural weapon) gains one negative level. This ability only triggers once per round, regardless of the number of attacks a vampire spawn makes.

Fast Healing (Su) A vampire spawn also gains fast healing 2. If reduced to 0 hit points in combat, a vampire spawn assumes gaseous form (see below) and attempts to escape. It must reach its coffin home within 2 hours or be utterly destroyed. (It can normally travel up to 9 miles in 2 hours.) Additional damage dealt to a vampire spawn forced into gaseous form has no effect. Once at rest, the vampire is helpless. It regains 1 hit point after 1 hour, then is no longer helpless and resumes healing at the rate of 2 hit points per round.

Gaseous Form (Su) As a standard action, a vampire spawn can assume *gaseous form* at will (caster level 5th), but it can remain gaseous indefinitely and has a fly speed of 20 feet with perfect maneuverability.

Resurrection Vulnerability (Su) A *raise dead* or similar spell cast on a vampire spawn destroys it (Will negates). Using the spell in this way does not require a material component.

Shadowless (Ex) A vampire spawn casts no shadows and shows no reflection in a mirror.

Spider Climb (Ex) A vampire spawn can climb sheer surfaces as though under the effects of a *spider climb* spell.

Weaknesses Vampire spawns cannot tolerate the strong odor of garlic and will not enter an area laced with it. Similarly, they recoil from mirrors or strongly presented holy symbols. These things don't harm the vampire spawn—they merely keep it at bay. A recoiling vampire spawn must stay at least 5 feet away from the mirror or holy symbol and cannot touch or make melee attacks against that creature. Holding a vampire spawn at bay takes a standard action. After 1 round, a vampire spawn can overcome its revulsion of the object and function normally each round it makes a DC 25 Will save.

Vampire spawns cannot enter a private home or dwelling unless invited in by someone with the authority to do so.

Reducing a vampire spawn's hit points to 0 or lower incapacitates it but doesn't always destroy it (see fast healing). However, certain attacks can slay vampire spawns. Exposing any vampire spawn to direct sunlight staggers it on the first round of exposure and destroys it utterly on the second consecutive round of exposure if it does not escape. Each round of immersion in running water inflicts damage on a vampire spawn equal to one-third of its maximum hit points—a vampire spawn reduced to 0 hit points in this manner is destroyed. Driving a wooden stake through a helpless vampire spawn's heart instantly slays it (this is a full-round action). However, it returns to life if the stake is removed, unless the head is also severed and anointed with holy water.

Voluntary Vampirism

It is possible in an evil campaign that you may have PCs who are not repulsed by vampirism but are drawn by it. This is understandable – vampire is a powerful template and a strong story element. If a PC asks the Prince to make them a true vampire, Gaius will consider their request. Of course, before this is possible, he must receive the Chalice of Aurelius. But there is something else he desires almost as much as the Chalice. And for this, he will grant his gift of immortality and vampirism.

Prince Gaius wants to feed upon an angel.

Anyone who brings him both the Chalice of Aurelius and the living blood of an angel (any good celestial will do) will receive his gift of true vampirism. They will not be spawn (since he will immediately release them). Instead they will gain the Vampire template (a CR +2 template).

To avoid power imbalance between PCs, you should probably have the powers of a vampire slowly manifest in place of two class levels. This would represent the PC coming to control his new nature.

In Book IV an appendix more fully discusses the consequences of undead PCs (both vampire and lich).

Event Six: The Temple of Beauty

Not far from Valtaerna lives a legendary monster lurking inside a ruined temple of a long forgotten goddess of beauty – Izevel the Accursed. She does not age, nor does she need to eat or drink and so has been a recluse for years. She is completely cut off from the outside world and barely realizes that there is new king in Matharyn. What do such events matter to her? She lives alone with no one but her curse and the statuary of her victims to keep her company.

It was not always so. Once Izevel was a high priestess of the goddess of beauty. She was not entirely human but was instead an aasimar, blessed with the blood of an angel. She was regarded as one of the great beauties of the age and admirers would come from across the land for only a glimpse of her sweet smile. In time, this attention made Izevel arrogant.

Her story is an old and familiar one. How many temple leaders have in their arrogance forgotten that the faithful are not their followers, but are in fact devotees of their patron deity. This was the doom of Izevel the Beautiful.

Her pride overwhelmed her. In full view of the great statue of the goddess of beauty, Izevel laughed derisively as one of her priests made a humble offering. "You would as well worship me," she remarked. "At least I answer the occasional prayer."

Immediately the temple began to tremble and shake. Priests fled for their lives amidst the collapsing stonework. The great statue animated and proclaimed Izevel forever accursed. She fell wracked with pain and metamorphosed into a living nightmare. Her divine spells were stripped from her and she transformed from a beautiful priestess into a half-fiendish monstrosity whose very gaze was lethal. In horror at what she had become, she fled from chamber to chamber, turning the priests who tried to aid into her into statues. The temple was abandoned but Izevel remained to haunt it and forever lament her cursed state.

That was centuries ago. The cult of the goddess of beauty is now all but unknown in Talingarde. Even her name is no longer remembered. The Temple of Beauty is an empty ruin. Every so often, a questing knight or a band of adventurers will try to infiltrate the Temple and destroy Izevel. This is her only company any more – would-be heroes seeking to slay her and claim her head. Everyone has failed. Izevel may be mad with grief, but she is neither stupid nor suicidal. If she cannot be spared this cursed existence, she will at least share her suffering with anyone foolish enough to cross her path.

This is how the PCs find Izevel – mad with isolation and grief. She cares nothing for words, seeking only to petrify our villains and add them to her collections of foolish intruders. So how then can Izevel be transformed into an ally?

It is not easy. Izevel cannot be persuaded by words or promises. There is only one route to recruit her. The PCs must venture into her temple and defeat her in combat. Captured and humiliated, only then can anyone pierce the wounded pride of this vain monstrosity.

Izevel, ironically, could become one of the PC's most faithful servitors. She wants to leave her temple. She wants anything but the life she has now. She hates and despises guarding the temple of beauty. She has been here for centuries. She knows every cursed stone of the place. Any sort of change is welcome.

But she is so lost in her grief and madness that she has given up all hope of any sort of life beyond this temple. If the PCs can hold her down and beat some sense into the medusa, she will realize what she is being offered – a way out. And that is how the PCs can acquire Izevel as a follower.

Too Many Minions?

The forces of evil tend to gather minions. There is nothing wrong with this. Minions can provide a lot of color to the campaign. The problem arises when minions begin to slow down fights and overshadow PC contributions.

The PCs could conceivably, after the Temple of Beauty have gathered a lot of named servitors: Grumblejack, Artephius, Trik, Raiju, Izevel, the nightmare and three Nessian warhounds. And maybe more.

This can become a distraction. Such a large band could become unwieldy. Far better that the PCs should travel with a small number of memorable NPCs than a great host of forgettable lackeys. So, how do we handle this glut?

The short answer is 'Act Three'. We will soon embark upon a brutal, lengthy battle to conquer Valtaerna. In it, the PCs will fight to their edge of their strength to conquer this Mitran stronghold. Use this battle to weed out the underlings.

Pick a few cohorts who have not distinguished themselves in the campaign so far and target them. Kill them dead. It will clear out the riffraff and it will make the battle more memorable.

Izevel the Accursed **CR 11**

XP 12,800

Female advanced half-fiendish medusa
LE Medium outsider (native)
Init +8; **Senses** all-around vision, darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +19

DEFENSE

AC 18, touch 14, flat-footed 14 (+4 Dex, +4 natural)
hp 115 (10d10+60)
Fort +9, **Ref** +11, **Will** +11
Immune poison; **Resist** acid, cold, electricity and fire 10; **DR** 5/ magic; **SR** 22

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft., fly 60 ft. (good)
Melee dagger +13/+8 (1d4/19–20),snake bite +7 (1d4+1 plus poison)
Ranged mwk longbow +15/+10 (1d8/×3)
Special Attacks petrifying gaze, smite good

Spell-like Abilities (CL 10th, concentration +14)
1/day – contagion, desecrate, unholy blight
3/day – darkness, poison

TACTICS

During Combat Izevel prefers to rely upon her gaze and her spell-like abilities. She flies not with wings but by magic and uses this power to steer well away from melee combat. If she exhausts her spell-like abilities and faces a foe who is immune to her gaze, she relies upon her longbow preferring ranged combat. Melee is only a matter of last resort.
Morale Izevel is neither a fanatic or a coward, though she is possessed by rage. She fights to 28 hp and then tries to flee. If this proves impossible, she will surrender.

STATISTICS

Str 12, **Dex** 19, **Con** 22, **Int** 14, **Wis** 15, **Cha** 19
Base Atk +10; **CMB** +11; **CMD** 25
Feats Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Point-Blank Shot, Precise Shot, Weapon Finesse
Skills Bluff +14, Disguise +14, Intimidate +17, Knowledge (history) +15, Knowledge (religion) +15, Perception +19, Sense Motive +15, Stealth +17; **Racial Modifiers** +4 Perception
Languages Celestial, Common, Infernal
Gear dagger, masterwork longbow, 20 arrows, golden mask worth 450 gp, golden jewelry worth 1200 gp

SPECIAL ABILITIES

All-Around Vision (Ex) A medusa's snake-hair allows her to see in all directions. Medusas gain a +4 racial bonus to Perception checks and cannot be flanked.
Petrifying Gaze (Su) Turn to stone permanently, 30 feet, Fortitude DC 18 negates. The save DC is Charisma-based.
Poison (Ex) Bite—injury; *save* Fort DC 19; *frequency* 1/round for 6 rounds; *effect* 1d3 Str; *cure* 2 consecutive saves. The save DC is Constitution-based.
Smite Good (Su) Once per day, as a swift action, Izevel can smite good as the smite evil ability of a 10th level paladin, except affecting a good target. If the target is good, add +4 to attack rolls and +10 to all damage rolls against the target. If the target of smite good is an outsider with the good subtype or a good-aligned dragon, the bonus to damage on the first successful attack increases to 20 points of damage. Regardless of the target, smite attacks automatically bypass any DR the creature might possess. The smite persists until the target is dead or Izevel rests.

NOTE: The Map of the Temple Beauty is on page 28.

Event Seven: Old Wounds

Talingarde may be a predominantly human kingdom, but it would not be as powerful as it is today if it were not for the dwarves. When the first Talirean settlers arrived on this island, they discovered that there were already thriving civilizations here – the Iraen, the Yutak and the Ice Elves just to name a few. But the most civilized and developed people on this island were the dwarves of the Ansgarian mountains.

Human history has largely forgotten the first meetings between dwarf and man. They were rarely cordial. The dwarves were rich with treasure and scattered in separate small mountain holds, each an independent city state. One by one, the dwarven holds fell either by war, disease or cultural integration.

The dwarven population slowly integrated into the human population and you have the situation you have today – dwarves and humans living side by side with largely the same culture. These dwarves have made their mark on Talirean civilization from top to bottom. From the steel plows in the fields to the fine plate armor so ubiquitous among the knights and nobles, dwarvish technology is everywhere.

But there were a few dwarven holds that did not go quietly. Sensing their eminent lessening and destruction, they cursed their fate and turned to old, forbidden dark gods of the earth. They pledged their loyalty to these infernal deities if only the human tide would be abated. It was these dwarves, corrupted and twisted by hatred and dark magics, who became the duergar.

The duergar fought both invading human and dwarf to the last and it seemed for a while that they might actually prevail. But then the humans unveiled a new sort of ally. Dwarven warriors fought alongside human soldiers. These dwarven tunnel-fighters and engineers rooted out the duergar in their fastholds and scattered the corrupted dwarves. Only a few hidden fortresses yet survive in Talingarde and they continue to exist only by savagely guarding their secrecy.

There is a hidden duergar stronghold not far from Valtaerna known as Zhaanzen-Kryr (pronounced ZON-zen-crier). Thane Zashur Arzen hates the sun-worshipping Mitrans with an almost blinding anger. For decades since he took the crown, his spies have reported to him victory after victory for this despised enemy. Impotently, the Thane has been able to do nothing. If presented with a workable plan that could preserve the secrecy of his people and inflict harm upon the Talireans he would leap at the chance.

Finding the duergar stronghold in the first place is not easy. With a vague description from either rumors or Sakkarot, it is virtually impossible to find any traces of the duergar in the mountains. A DC 35 Survival skill check is required to find a duergar trail.

A better solution is to go the Library of Ghaster and ask Thrane about the duergar. Thrane can indeed locate an older book that mentions the lost dwarven stronghold of Zhaanze-Kryr not far from the Vale. The book gives much more specific directions and reduces the needed Tracking roll to a DC 25 Survival skill check.

Regardless, if the PCs manage to catch up with a duergar patrol, the xenophobic dark dwarves will not acquiesce to allowing a visit easily. A successful Bluff or Intimidate skill test (DC 25) will convince the small patrol to bring the PCs to the gates of Zhaanzen-Kryr.

There guards demand they surrender their weapons and any obvious magical items. Convincing them to relent is difficult but a DC 25 Intimidate skill check will persuade them that they had best let the PCs through.

Another way to enter without giving up their gear is to kill a half dozen duergar warriors and fight their way to the throne room. Thane Zashur will not be thrilled about his men getting slaughtered and all difficulties for subsequent rolls to persuade the Thane are increased by five. But the Thane also respects strength and audacity. He will listen to what these powerful intruders have to say.

On the way to the throne room, the PCs pass through the splendor of the duergar undercity of Zhaanzen-Kryr. The duergar may be loathsome servants of darkness, but they still have all the craft and skill of the dwarves. The architecture is masterful – a dark fairy tale of stone. Everywhere are murals depicting the duergar's betrayal by their dwarven kin and the duergar's eventual victory and retribution. Litanies of hate cover the walls of Zhaansen-Kryr.

Zhaansen-Kryr is not a huge community. Even in their brief transit through the undercity, the PCs can estimate there are probably not more than a thousand duergar in this entire holdfast. Glowing eyes pierce the bleak gloom of the duergar and watch the above worlders with anger and curiosity. If the PCs understand the undercommon tongue, they can hear many of the duergar whispering dire threats and the phrase "Fools! The thane will see they face the fire before this day is out." Face the fire is a reference to grisly and torturous way that the duergar make offerings to their dark gods – roasting alive their victims upon a great brass coffer.

If the PCs talk their way in and manage an audience with the Thane, their trials are not over. Thane Zashur Arzen hates all surface dwellers and that certainly includes the PCs. His first impulse is to have them imprisoned and dragged down to the sacrificial altar to face the fires of their dark gods. It takes a DC 20 Bluff, Diplomacy or Intimidate skill check to convince him that our band of villains are either too dangerous or worth more alive. Give the PCs a +4 bonus to this roll if they mention that they have an army of bugbears in their service. The Thane may despise surface dwellers, but he does not desire war with the Fire-Axe's army.

Having convinced him to listen, they still must find a way to persuade him to help. Thane Zashur is not eager to spend his small fighting force's lives on a fool's errand. It will take a DC 30 diplomacy check to gain his aid.

The PCs can do much to gain bonuses to this roll. First, they can mention that they have an alliance with the Fire-Axe. The Thane may be isolated in his undercity but even he has heard of the victories won by the Fire-Axe. Award a +4 bonus for mentioning this alliance.

Zashur Arzen, duergan thane CR 9

XP 6,400

Male duergar fighter (weapon master) 9
LE Medium humanoid (dwarf)
Init +1; **Senses** darkvision 120 ft.; Perception +2

DEFENSE

AC 21, touch 11, flat-footed 20 (+11 armor, +1 Dex)
hp 103 (9d10+54)
Fort +10, **Ref** +4, **Will** +5; +2 vs. spells and spell-like abilities
Defensive Abilities mirror move (greataxe +2)
Immune paralysis, phantasms, poison
Weaknesses light sensitivity

OFFENSE

Speed 20 ft.
Melee +1 *greataxe* power attack +15/+10 (1d12+19/19-20/x3)
Ranged throwing axe +10 (1d6+4)
Special Attacks reliable strike 1/day, weapon training (greataxe +2)

TACTICS

During Combat Prefers to rely on his warriors and only fights if cornered. If forced into a fight, he power attacks with his greataxe
Morale Zashur is never going to be a fanatic follower of any cause but his own. Reduced to 34 hit points or less, he flees. If he cannot flee, he surrenders and will trade any information he knows for his own life.

STATISTICS

Str 18, **Dex** 12, **Con** 18, **Int** 11, **Wis** 14, **Cha** 8
Base Atk +9/+4; **CMB** +13; **CMD** 24 (26 vs. disarm, sunder; 28 vs. bull rush, trip)
Feats Cleave, Cleaving Finish, Great Cleave, Greater Weapon Focus (greataxe), Improved Cleaving Finish, Improved Critical (greataxe), Power Attack, Toughness, Weapon Focus (greataxe), Weapon Specialization (greataxe)
Skills Climb +10, Intimidate +10
Languages Common, Dwarven, Undercommon
SQ duergar traits, light sensitivity, weapon guard (greataxe +2)
Combat Gear throwing axe (5)
Other Gear +1 *full plate*, +1 *greataxe*

If the PCs mention the alliance with Prince Gaius the Thane is impressed. Prince Gaius is known as a powerful and ancient being. Award a +2 for mentioning this.

If the PCs present a worthy gift (worth at least 1000 gp) and play to the Thane's vanity, this earns a +2 bonus.

If the PCs describe how they successfully summoned the daemon prince Vetra-Kali, that impresses the thane. He knows of Vetra-Kali and the cult of death that served him. Award a +2 bonus.

But there is one way above all others to immediately earn the favor of Zashur Arzen – bring him dwarven prisoners as an offering. Thane Zashur accepts them with relish and our villains are invited to a special festival wherein the dwarves are shaved, publically tortured and then sacrificed by being roasted on a great brass grill. The PCs receive a +10 bonus to gain Thane Zashur as an ally.

If persuaded, the Thane sends his son Zargun Arzen and hundred duergar armed with axes and crossbows to the battle. These duergar do not join the PC's retinue but instead fight together as a unit. They only fight in this one battle and they only fight at night.

Story Award: Award a CR 10 (9,600 XP) award and 4 VP for gaining the assistance of the duergar army.

Duergar Warriors of Zhaanzen-Kryr CR 1/3

XP 135

Duergar warrior 1
LE Medium humanoid (dwarf)
Init –1; **Senses** darkvision 120 ft; Perception +1

DEFENSE

AC 17, touch 9, flat-footed 17 (+6 armor, –1 Dex, +2 shield)
hp 7 (1d10+2)
Fort +4, **Ref** –1, **Will** +1; +2 vs. spells
Immune paralysis, phantasms, poison
Weaknesses light sensitivity

OFFENSE

Speed 20 ft.
Melee warhammer +3 (1d8+1/×3)
Ranged light crossbow +0 (1d8/19–20)
Spell-Like Abilities (CL 3rd)
1/day—enlarge person(self only), invisibility (self only)

TACTICS

During Combat The duergar warriors prefer to use their *invisibility* and *enlarge person* abilities to get close and attack from surprise to maximun effect.
Morale The duergar are dedicated but not fanatic. If outnumbered and obviously outclassed, they will flee.

STATISTICS

Str 12, **Dex** 9, **Con** 15, **Int** 10, **Wis** 13, **Cha** 4
Base Atk +1; **CMB** +2; **CMD** 11
Feats Weapon Focus (warhammer)
Skills Intimidate +1, Stealth –3 (+17 when invisible); **Racial Modifiers** +2 Perception relating to stonework, +4 Stealth
Languages Common, Dwarven, Undercommon
SQ slow and steady, stability
Gear warhammer, light crossbow, 20 bolts, heavy steel shield, chainmail, 1d6 gp

ACT THREE: THE BATTLE OF SAINTSBRIDGE

This act describes the taking of the Vale of Valtaerna by way of the climactic battle of Saintsbridge.

Event One: Before the Battle

After building their army, the PCs now must formulate their plan of attack. It is not hard in Ghastenhall to find individuals who have made the pilgrimage to the Vale. These pilgrims can give basic information:

1. To enter the Vale you must cross the two bridges of Saintsbridge beyond the Watchtower.

2. Once inside the Vale, you lodge within the township of Sanctum, a small place mostly populated with priests and guards.

3. Sanctum sits on the banks of the beautiful Lake Parynthus, famed for its healing waters.

4. Inside the Vale is the legendary Mountain of the Phoenix. This spire of stone seems impossible to climb yet every true priest of Mitra must accomplish the feat. Atop the spire there is a flame that never dies. Could that be the legendary phoenix itself?

5. Further still in the shadow of Mount Mitrandius is the famed Garden of Serenity and the Cathedral of Mitra Made Manifest. No one goes there but Mitra's chosen.

These facts comprise most of what is common knowledge about the veil.

There are other ways to get information. First and foremost, our band of villains should talk to Brother Barnabus Thrane. He is a member of the clergy of Mitra amd a traitor to his faith. He has much to say about the Vale.

"The Vale of Valtaerna? Of course I know the place. I have made the pilgrimage several times and even held audience with the head of the Order of Saint Macarius – Earnan MacCathlain. The Vale is a beautiful place but too placid for my tastes. The residents of that Vale are so locked in tradition and orthodoxy that it takes a dozen prayers and a week of consultation with the Lord-Abbot for them to change the color of their socks. What would you like to know about the Vale?"

Q: Where is the Vale?

A: You have a map? It is less than fifty miles from where we stand in the eastern Ansgarian mountains.

Q: How do you enter the Vale?

A: *You must pass through the Watchtower at Saintsbridge. This will be no trouble for a small group of travellers. Merely tell them you are pilgrims and they will let you pass. Be sure to hide your true allegiance by both disguise and spell. They say there are beings in the Watchtower of Saintsbridge that can smell evil.*

Q: How is the Watchtower guarded?

A: There is a contingent of holy warriors commanded by the Captain of the Watchtower. At least fifty men I think. There are also two strange statues in the causeway. I have never seen them move, but it is persistently rumored that they are some sort of golem. I know not the truth of this.

Q: How many soldiers are in the Vale?

A: It is difficult to be sure. I believe there were once more than five hundred plus a contingent of dwarves. But I think it likely some of them have been called to the war. How many are there today? I cannot say. But it is not the soldiers that should worry you. There are rumors of all sorts of celestial beings from the higher realms that reside in that place. Those are your true enemies.

Q: What is inside the Vale?

A: Beautiful, serene place the Vale – completely unprepared for an attack. There is the town of Sanctum, a small village where the priests, guards and farmers who live in the valley make their home. There is the legendary Mountain of the Phoenix. I've never been to that place. I'm unsure how you even get up there.

And beyond that is the Garden of Serenity and the Cathedral of Mitra Made Manifest. I am unsure what dwells within those places, but whatever it is – it will not be happy to see you.

Q: Do you know anything else?

A: Yes, there is one more thing. Something I came across in one of my tomes. Saint Macarius founded the order that bears his name but he wasn't the only saint that order produced. Saint Angelo called the Wise was perhaps the greatest devil hunter this island ever produced. Though long dead, it is said he captured many artifacts of Father's faith. Those that he could destroy, he did. But a few – and this is where it caught my attention – a few he could not destroy.

Those he had placed within a great vault and hidden from the world. My source does not say where the vault is. I'm not even completely sure it is in Valtaerna. But I do know this – Saint Angelo commanded these evil artifacts placed where the "Sun never Sets". That could be a poetic way of referring to the Vale with its eternal flames.

Visiting Sanctum

There is absolutely nothing stopping the PCs from visiting the Vale before winter. In fact, if they are clever they could find a band of pilgrims organizing in the Priest's Quarter and travel with them in disguise. This would mean they could enter the Vale without even a word to the security at the Watchtower.

Pilgrims to Valtaerna take three days to walk to the Vale. They take a very particular route stopping at a number of shrines each dedicated to various saints, martyrs and important figures of the Mitran Faith. They then spend three days in the Vale and then make the Pilgrimage back -- a nine day trip. These nine-day holy pilgrimages are constantly organizing in the Priest's Quarter of Ghastenhall and a paid guide will see to all the practical matters for 2 gp per pilgrim.

There is one precaution our band of villains had better make. When they approach the Watchtower, they must have *undetectable alignment* cast or they must have some way of defeating *detect evil*. Otherwise the Watchers (see below) will sense them and report the presence of evil to the Captain of the Watch.

The Captain of the Watch will then stop the pilgrims and personally see the group searched. Ultimately, the detect evil is not enough to make the Captain attack, but he will deny entry to anyone who the Watcher senses. *"Thou art unworthy. The Vale is not for the likes of you,"* is all he says. From that moment on the Captain will be wary of that individual.

Assuming the PCs make it past the Watchtower, they discover an idyllic green valley watered by the gentle River Aiden. Only farmlands and forests break up this valley of gently rolling hills. The township of Sanctum sits on the banks of the placid Lake Parynthus. And in the lake's center rises the Mountain of the Phoenix which sheds a comforting pale light upon the Vale day and night. Truly, Valtaerna is a vision of heaven on earth.

Security is lax inside the Vale and township itself. They only run into trouble if they try to visit the Gardens of Serenity (detailed in Act IV). The dock is guarded by Legion Archons (also detailed in Act IV) and they gently (at first) stop the PCs from going in further. *"The Gardens and the Cathedral are only for the anointed of Mitra,"* they intone. *"There are temples and shrines within Sanctum."*

Besides this, Sanctum almost defines a sleepy farming community. There are no brothels or seedy bars. The taverns all close after dark. Farholde and Ghastenhall may have both been good-aligned but they both still had bad parts of town. Sanctum lacks this entirely.

Sanctum

LG large town
Corruption -4; **Crime** -2 **Economy** +1; **Law** +2; **Lore** +0; **Society** +1
Qualities holy site, insular, magically attuned, pious, tourist attraction
Danger 0

DEMOGRAPHICS

Government autocracy chosen by the Church of Mitra
Population 3,750 (3,000 humans; 500 dwarves; 120 halflings; 100 aasimar; 30 other)
Notable NPCs
Earnan MacCathlain, head of the Order of Macarius, spiritual head of the Vale **(LG male human cleric 15)**
The Master of Serenity, master of the Serene Order (LG male human monk 14)
Brother Nicodemus Getz, first student of the Master (LG male human monk 10)
Sambethe, the Oracle of Mitra (LG female aasimar oracle 14)
Sir Dallidan the Bold, first knight of the Vale (LG male human fighter 9)
Sir Giles of Tell, master-archer (NG male human fighter 8)
Arthis Fidelis, Watch Captain (LG male human fighter 10)
Durhan One-Stroke, thane (LG male dwarven fighter 9)
Mayor Timon Lotte, mayor and reeve of Sanctum (LG male human expert 7)

MARKETPLACE

Base Value 2200 gp; **Purchase Limit** 10000 gp ; **Spellcasting** 8th level divine, 3rd level arcane
Minor Items 3d4; **Medium Items** 2d4; **Major Items** 1d4

What is to be seen everywhere are priests -- monks, lay clergy, visiting clergy and local church officials. Wags joke that Sanctum is half-church. This is only a small exaggeration. There are more churches, temples and shrines per capita here than anywhere else in Talingarde. This is a community centered around religion. The PCs have come to Mitra central. If there is one saving grace, there is hardly a cheaper place to visit. In fact, a number of the inns are free for pilgrims. If you don't mind sharing a common room full of believers it costs nothing to visit Sanctum.

Even the dwarves here are largely garrisoned soldiers, construction crews and their families. Few of these dwarves are longterm inhabitants and so are on their best behavior. These duteous dwarves waste little time here in the Vale on drinking and revelries. And when they do, they do it alone in closed buildings where non-dwarves and pilgrims are not allowed.

The closest thing that Sanctum has to a night life is the farmer's tavern. There are one hundred and twenty halfling farmers living in the Vale and they enjoy their ale. They congregate at the "Halfway to Heaven House". This surprisingly raucous tavern reverberates with music, singing and dancing. If you don't mind drinking with halfling peasants, this is the only place in town where you can get a decent drink.

Story Award: Award the PCs a CR 10 (9,600 XP) reward for effectively scouting Sanctum and the Vale.

The Watchtower of Saintsbridge

= 10 ft.

N

Top Level (Roof)

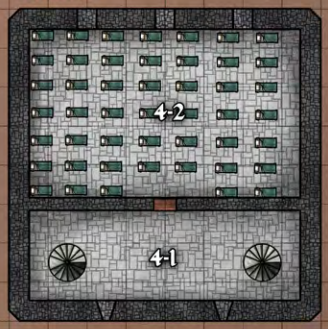
Level 1 (ground)

The Wall

Level 2

Level 3

Level 4



Temple of Beauty

= 10 ft.

The Watchtower of Saintsbridge

The Watchtower of Saintsbridge might seem vulnerable. There are no siege engines or murder holes typical of Talirean gatehouses. And security, even in this time of war, is somewhat lax. No one is expecting the Fire-Axe's horde to attack here, especially in winter. And yet, security is in another sense tighter than anything the PCs have ever faced before. The security here is not measured by the number of troops stationed here or their equipment. Instead, the security here emanates from the power of the divine Mitra.

From a distance the tower presents an imposing figure. Made of white stone, it is solidly built and a great banner hangs along its facade announcing to anyone who somehow hasn't figured it out yet that this is a fortress in service to Talingarde and the Church of Mitra. The Tower itself has a faintly magic presence that keeps it warm and comfortable without a single fireplace.

The Watchtower is the centerpiece of a wall that closes the entire entranceway into the Vale. Climbing the steep mountains that surround the Vale might be possible for a few mountain goats, but anything else will either have to either fly or pass through this chokepoint. The Watchtower is not here by accident. This location is key to controlling access to the Vale of Valtaerna beyond.

Haven't We Already Done Balentyne?

In Book One, our villains already infiltrated and destroyed a watchtower. Do we want to repeat that experience? Definitely not. How do we ensure that Saintsbridge is different?

By 10th level the PCs have 5th level spells. With spells such as *scrying, teleport, overland flight* and *transmute rock to mud* at the PC's disposal, fortifications are much less formidable. The obstacle here is not the Watchtower. It is the defenders.

The Watchtower consists of three meaningful battles – the Captain and his dozen holy warriors, the Watchers and the golems. If our villains can take out the defenders before the gong at the top of the watchtower can be struck, they will have succeeded. In short, this is no longer a slow infiltration. This is a race! The PCs must destroy every defender before the gong is struck. If they do this, then the Battle of Saintsbridge is a battle fought on open ground. If they fail, then the Battle of Saintsbridge is a siege against a defended wall. I know which sort of battle I would prefer to fight if this was my horde!

The Watchtower of Saintsbridge
Level 1 (Ground)

1-1 Causeway

This wide passage with portcullises at both ends allows passage through to the Vale beyond. The floor here is cobbled stone and well-trodden by many visitors.

1-1A Strange Statues

Two massive statues depicting powerfully built men crudely formed from clay adorn the end of the causeway. In truth, these are not statues at all but clay golems animated long ago by the divine might of the Mitran clergy. They answer the commands of Captain Arthis Fidelis, commander of the watch tower. They also attack anyone who attempts to batter down either of the portcullises. Other than those conditions, they remain motionless and wait for command.

1-2 Western Guardroom

This plain guardroom is manned by six soldiers and two holy warriors day and night. Arrow slits allow a fine view into the causeway (room 1-1). There is a trap door in the ceiling and a ladder that leads up to Level 2 (room 2-3). There is also the mechanism for raising the southern portcullis (in room 1-1). Otherwise, this room is empty of interesting items.

The Captain of the Watchtower runs a tight ship and the men here are always alert, sober and ready for trouble. Still, it has been months since anything interesting happened. Until trouble presents itself, they are relaxed and at ease. Watching the pilgrims come and go through this watchtower is considered an easy duty and all these men are glad to be here rather than called away to join the war effort in the north.

Six Soldiers of the Watch CR 1/2

XP 200 each (1200 XP total)
hp 13 each (see page 33 below)

Two Holy Warriors CR 3

XP 800 each (1600 XP total)
hp 37 each (see page 32 below)

If there is trouble in the causeway, these guards attack whoever is fighting the golems with their crossbows while the holy warriors blow the signal horns and call for reinforcements.

1-3 Eastern Guardroom

This room is the eastern equivalent of room 1-2. It too is manned by six soldiers and two holy warriors. The mechanism here raises the northern portcullis.

Clay Golems CR 10

XP 9,600 each (19,200 XP total)
N Large construct
Init –1; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; Perception +0

DEFENSE

AC 24, touch 8, flat-footed 24 (–1 Dex, +16 natural, –1 size)
hp 101 (13d10+30)
Fort +4, **Ref** +3, **Will** +4
DR 10/adamantine and bludgeoning; **Immune** construct traits, magic

OFFENSE

Speed 20 ft.
Melee 2 slams +19 (2d10+7 plus cursed wound)
Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft.
Special Attacks haste

TACTICS

During Combat The golems basically have one plan – smash any foe within the causeway. It is a plan that has served them well in every battle they've ever faced. Don't forget to use their haste ability after a round of combat.
Morale These constructs fight to the death to defend the causeway. It is their purpose.

STATISTICS

Str 24, **Dex** 9, **Con** —, **Int** —, **Wis** 11, **Cha** 1
Base Atk +13; **CMB** +21; **CMD** 30

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Soothed by the Glory of Mitra (Ex) Unlike normal clay golems, these have no chance of going berserk as long as they are used to glorify and guard the faithful of Mitra.

Cursed Wound (Ex) The damage a clay golem deals doesn't heal naturally and resists magical healing. A character attempting to use magical healing on a creature damaged by a clay golem must succeed on a DC 26 caster level check, or the healing has no effect on the injured creature.

Haste (Su) After it has engaged in at least 1 round of combat, a clay golem can haste itself once per day as a free action. The effect lasts 3 rounds and is otherwise the same as the spell.

Immunity to Magic (Ex) A clay golem is immune to any spell or spell-like ability that allows spell resistance. In addition, certain spells and effects function differently against the creature, as noted below.

A *move earth* spell drives the golem back 120 feet and deals 3d12 points of damage to it (no save).
A *disintegrate* spell slows the golem (as the slow spell) for 1d6 rounds and deals 1d12 points of damage (no save).
An *earthquake* spell cast directly at a clay golem stops it from moving on its next turn and deals 5d10 points of damage (no save).

Any magical attack against a clay golem that deals acid damage heals 1 point of damage for every 3 points of damage it would otherwise deal. If the amount of healing would cause the golem to exceed its full normal hit points, it gains any excess as temporary hit points. A clay golem gets no saving throw against magical attacks that deal acid damage.

Six Soldiers of the Watch CR 1/2

XP 200 each (1200 XP total)
hp 13 each (see page 33 below)

Two Holy Warriors CR 3

XP 800 each (1600 XP total)
hp 37 each (see page 32 below)

The Wall

This long broad wall completely covers the entrance to the Vale. Crenellated and buttressed, this wall is impossible to breach without powerful siege equipment or magic. A couple of soldiers of the watch pace back and forth on either side of the Watchtower (which is in the center of the wall).

Two Soldiers of the Watch (stationed on the western wall) CR 1/2

XP 200 each (400 XP total)
hp 13 each (see page 33 below)

Two Soldiers of the Watch (stationed on the eastern wall) CR 1/2

XP 200 each (400 XP total)
hp 13 each (see page 32 below)

The soldiers also possess bullseye lanterns in addition to the usual kit. If anyone approaches the wall and is seen, the soldiers first hale them (assuming they aren't obviously hostile) and tell them they can only enter the Vale through the Watchtower.

Only if the person attacks first or refuses to answer their hales will the soldiers use their crossbows.

If they catch anyone trying to scale the walls, they blast out a signal that calls for reinforcements and try to hold the wall until reinforcements arrive.

Level 2

2-1 Main Hallway

This hallway has doors at both ends and connects the eastern wall to the west. No soldiers are currently stationed here although if there is trouble, two will be. This room is lit by oil lamps and otherwise empty of interesting features. There are three stout wooden doors that lead to the guardrooms and storerooms that dominate this level of the watchtower.

2-2 Guardroom

This broad guard room overlooks the approach to the vale. Six soldiers are stationed here, their duty to keep an eye out for anyone approaching the Watchtower. If anyone does approach, they sound a signal. This is not the signal to attack. Instead, the Captain will go up to the roof and hale any who approach (assuming they're not obviously hostile).

There are two stout stone spiral staircases that lead all the way up to the roof in the guardroom.

Six Soldiers of the Watch CR 1/2

XP 200 each (1200 XP total)
hp 13 each (see page 33 below)

2-3 Western Storehouse

This room is where the trap door in room 1-2 connects. Besides that, this chamber is also crammed with common supplies. There is enough dried food here to feed the Watchtower garrison for a month. This room is stacked to the ceiling with these durable foodstuffs. There are also torches, oil, blankets, bricks, wood, rope and other common items necessary to supply the tower.

2-4 Eastern Storehouse

This room is where the trapdoor in room 1-3 connects. Besides that, this chamber is also crammed with barrels full of fresh water. There is enough water here to supply the needs of the watchtower for two weeks. This water is used only occasionally. They usually just draw the water out of the nearby stream. This water is reserved for emergencies.

Level 3

3-1 Guardroom

This plain guardroom is manned by two holy warriors.

Two Holy Warriors CR 3

XP 800 each (1600 XP total)
hp 37 each (see page 32 below)

3-1A Shrine to Mitra

This humble shrine is little more than an inset shelf adorned with the carvings of saints venerating all three aspects of Mitra. There is a small silver chalice that is magically refills every day with cold, pure water. Every day the twelve holy warriors and the Captain stop by this shrine, say a brief prayer, and sip the water to know that Mitra blesses them for their duty.

Adored and prayed at everyday by this retinue of servants of Mitra, this shrine has become an unintentional trap for intruders. Anyone evil who touches the silver chalice releases a great burst of holy energy injurious to the wicked. Captured guards or warriors cannot warn the PCs about this "trap" because no one in the tower realizes it's here.

Divine Sanction of Mitra CR 10

Type magical; **Perception** DC 34; **Disable Device** n/a (see below)

EFFECTS

Trigger An evil creature touching the silver chalice (*true seeing, detect evil*) **Reset** none (it will take years of devotion to build up this much positive energy once more)

Effect spell effect (energy drain, Atk +10 touch, 2d4 temporary negative levels, DC 23 Fortitude negates after 24 hours)

NOTE: This "trap" detects good (moderate aura) and cannot be defeated with disable device. Instead a *desecrate* spell will remove the danger here.

3-2 Barracks of the Holy Warriors

The barracks where are quartered a dozen holy warriors. Half of them are always on duty and the rest are likely here, praying, chatting and preparing for their next shift. During winter they rarely leave the Watchtower, instead remaining here or perhaps visiting the nearby shrine (3-1A) for a moment of quiet contemplation.

These men are not typical soldiery. These are warrior-monks of the Order of Saint Macarius. They have all given their lives to the defense of this Vale and the holy sites within. They have sworn oaths of chastity, poverty and devotion to the Order. Even off duty, they are likely armored and ready for a chance to serve the Order.

Holy Warrior CR 3

XP 800
Human warrior 5
LG Medium humanoid
Init +0; **Senses** Perception +3

DEFENSE

AC 18, touch 10, flat-footed 18 (+6 armor, +2 shield)
hp 37 (5d10+10)
Fort +5, **Ref** +1, **Will** +1

OFFENSE

Speed 20 ft.
Melee masterwork longsword +10 (1d8+3/19-20x2)
dagger +8 (1d4+3/19-20x2)

TACTICS

During Combat With shouts of "For Talingarde! For Mitra! Till all is light!" they charge into battle and power attack with their longswords. That is about the extent of the holy warrior's tactics.
Morale These religious fanatics fight to the death against anyone trying to raid their beloved Vale.

STATISTICS

Str 16, **Dex** 11, **Con** 12, **Int** 10, **Wis** 10, **Cha** 12
Base Atk +5; CMB +8; CMD 18
Feats Alertness, Cleave, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (longsword)
Skills Climb +7, Intimidate +9, Perception +3, Sense Motive +4, Swim +7
Languages Common
Gear masterwork longsword, dagger, breastplate, heavy steel shield, tabard of the holy order

3-3 Office of the Captain

This is the office of the Captain of the Watchtower, Arthis Fidelis. It is a spartan place featuring little more than plain wooden table, chairs, writing set and a few pieces of paper (the duty rosters and reports). The only source of light usually here is a single candle. The captain spends several hours a day here completing paperwork and generally conducting the business of the Tower.

Of possible interest to the PCs is a heavy bound journal kept ina locked strongbox (good lock – DC 30 to open). This journal details the entire order of battle of the Vale. If the PCs discover it, it lays out what they can expect to fight in the coming Battle of Saintsbridge.

The captain himself is a veteran knight-monk, tonsured and stern. He wears platemail almost constantly and over his armor is a blue and white tabard adorned with the heraldry of the Order of Saint Macarius – A Mitran sunburst on a shield with angel wings. In the center of the Mitran sunbust are the ornate letters VMI – Via Mitra Invictus (by Mitra I am unconquerable) – the motto of the militant arm of the Order.

Arthis Fidelis is not his birthname. By tradition, officers of the Vale Watch give up their name and take a name of the Order. This man is a fanatic's fanatic. He was born in the Vale of Valtaerna, the child of a priest of Mitra (remember that most priests are not celibate). The Church is all he knows. He has risen from the ranks of the Holy Warriors and proven himself devoted and devout beyond all others. He will gladly give his life to defend this Watchtower and the Vale.

Anyone who enters this office who isn't one of his holy warriors or a soldier of the tower is here without authorization. He demands an explanation and if none is given, he attemps to arrest the intruder for espionage. If he does by some chance take a prisoner, he does not keep them here. He instead appoints a detail of Holy Warriors to take them to Sanctum.

Captain Arthis Fidelis, Watchtower Captain of Saintsbridge CR 10

XP 9,600
Male human warrior 12
LG Medium humanoid
Init +1; **Senses** Perception +9

DEFENSE

AC 20, touch 11, flat-footed 19 (+9 armor, +1 Dex)
hp 102 (12d10+36)
Fort +9, **Ref** +5, **Will** +6

OFFENSE

Speed 20 ft.
Melee +1 *greatsword* +19/+14 (2d6+8/17-20x2)
+1 *greatsword* power attack +14/+9 (2d6+23/17-20x2)
dagger +17/+12 (1d4+5/19-20x2)

TACTICS

During Combat The captain is a straight forward charge and attack sort of combatant. He uses power attack frequently and is hoping for a critical threat. Don't forget to add his +4 bonus from Critical Focus to backup critical hits.
Morale The Captain fights to the death to defend the Watchtower and the Vale.

STATISTICS

Str 20, **Dex** 12, **Con** 12, **Int** 10, **Wis** 12, **Cha** 12
Base Atk +12; CMB +17; CMD 28
Feats Alertness, Critical Focus, Improved Critical, Intimidating Prowess, Power Attack, Toughness, Weapon Focus (greatsword)
Skills Intimidate +21, Knowledge (religion) +16, Perception +9, Sense Motive +9
Languages Common
Traits Indomitable Faith -- +1 trait bonus to will saves
Child of the Temple -- +1 to Knowledge (religion) and its always a class skill.
Gear +1 *greatsword*, masterwork full plate, dagger, tabard of office

3-4 Private Chambers of the Captain

These spartan private chambers are where the captain rests. There are some basic bedroom items and holy texts of Mitra. In short, there is little of interest.

Level 4

4-1 Guardroom

This plain guardroom is manned by two soldiers day and night. They mostly guard the barracks and make sure no one unauthorized disturbs the men.

Two Soldiers of the Watch CR 1/2

XP 200 each (400 XP total)
hp 13 each (see page 33 below)

4-2 Main Barracks

Here fifty soldiers of the watch bunk. At any one time there are 10+2d10 off duty soldiers here out of their armor. Unlike the holy warriors, these are not religious fanatics. These are just typical soldiers of Talingarde who have been assigned to guard the Vale of Valtaerna. Some of them were born here and lived here all their life. Some of them are from elsewhere, perhaps a small town or big cities like Ghastenhall and got assigned here.

They are proud to be defending such an important and sacred place, but they are not interested in dying to defend it. If wounded below half hit points they will surrender and if captured, they will tell everything they know under even the slightest threat of torture. Unfortunately, they know very little.

The men here are likely to be gambling and laughing when off duty. There are a large number of guards with high enough turnover that if someone enters dressed as a guard they may be unnoticed as anyone unusual.

If someone bothers to open all the footlockers (DC 20 to open) there are about 300 gp worth of coinage and small personal treasures.

Soldiers of the Watch CR 1/2

XP 200
Human warrior 2
NG Medium humanoid
Init +0; **Senses** Perception +4

DEFENSE

AC 16, touch 10, flat-footed 16 (+6 armor)
hp 13 (2d10+2)
Fort +5, **Ref** +0, **Will** +0

OFFENSE

Speed 20 ft.
Melee halberd +5 (1d10+3/x3)
dagger +4 (1d4+2/19-20)
Ranged heavy crossbow +2 (1d10/19-20)

STATISTICS

Str 14, **Dex** 10, **Con** 14, **Int** 10, **Wis** 10, **Cha** 8
Base Atk +2; **CMB** +4; **CMD** 14
Feats Alertness, Weapon Focus (halberd)
Skills Craft (various) +5, Intimidate +4, Perception +4, Profession (Soldier) +5, Sense Motive +2
Languages Common
Gear breastplate, halberd, dagger, heavy crossbow, 10 bolts, signal horn,1d6 gold, strongbox key

The Roof of the Watchtower

This is the crenellated room of the watch tower. It is accessible by the two spiral staircases that run from the second floor to here. There is a heavy brass gong suspended between two large stone pillars that rise from the tower floor. This large and reverberating instrument is the warning signal for the Vale and raises the entire defense force to arms. It is never used casually. To sound the gong without there being an actual emergency is punished by forty lashes in the public square. The gong is secured by heavy ropes that take two full round actions to untie. Until those ropes are loosened the gong will not sound. This prevents the wind, rain or snow from sounding the gong accidentally.

During the winter, because of the frequent inclement weather, soldiers and holy warriors are usually not posted on the top of the tower. Only in times of high alert will such troops be posted here. Twenty soldiers on this tower armed with crossbows can do great damage to any army that must pass into the Vale.

However, soldiers are not what guards this rooftop. This is the domain of the Watchers. Marked with an 'A' these two strange four-legged creatures keep eternal vigil here on the rooftop. They rarely speak aloud instead preferring to speak telepathically to one another.

Whenever a new captain of the watchtower is chosen, he must go before the Watchers and see if he is acceptable. The watchers then use their *holy smites* upon the captain. If the captain is unharmed by these attacks, then he is acceptable. They then bond with the captain and from then on, he can be communicated to telepathically by these strange celestial guardians.

The guardians also share the tale of how they came to be bound to the Vale. When Ara Mathra the angel (see Act V) first came to this plane, he discovered the lammasu. To their shame, they had become corrupted. They roamed the wastelands of the world, feeding upon the weak.

Ara Mathra defeated them and instead of killing them redeemed them. He shared his blood with them and through the angel, the lammasu were reborn as half-celestial beings. For as long as Ara Mathra chooses to stay in the Vale and foster the Order of Saint Macarius, they will guard the approach into his lair. This defense may cost them their lives, but they are unconcerned. Because of Ara Mathra the watchers know that they are guaranteed a place in the celestial realms whenever their guardianship is at an end. Until that time, they wait, sensing that somewhere in Talingarde a great evil grows.

The Watchers **CR 10**

XP 9,600 each (19,200 XP total)
Half-celestial lammasu
LG Large outsider (native)
Init +6; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; Perception +16
Aura *magic circle against evil* (20 ft.)

DEFENSE

AC 23, touch 11, flat-footed 21 (+2 Dex, +12 natural, -1 size)
hp 112 (9d10+63)
Fort +13, **Ref** +10, **Will** +9 ; +4 racial bonus vs. poison
DR 5/magic; Immune disease; Resist acid, cold and electricity 10
SR 21

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft., fly 60 ft. (average)
Melee 2 claws +16 (1d8+8), 2 wings +11 (1d6+5)
Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 5 ft.
Special Attacks pounce, rake (2 claws +16; 1d8+8)
Spell-Like Abilities (CL 9th; concentration +13)

Constant – *detect evil*
3/day—*greater invisibility, protection from evil*
1/day—*aid, bless, cure serious wounds, dimension door, dispel evil, holy smite, neutralize poison, remove disease*

Spells Known (CL 7th; concentration +11)
3rd (4/day)—*cure serious wounds*, *searing light*
2nd (7/day)—*cure moderate wounds*, *lesser restoration*, *resist energy*
1st (7/day)—*bless*, *command* (DC 13), *cure light wounds*, *divine favor*, *shield of faith*
0 (at will)—*detect magic*, *detect poison*, *guidance*, *mending*, *purify food and drink*, *resistance*, stabilize

TACTICS

During Combat The Watchers prefer to pounce into combat using their numerous physical attacks plus their powerful rakes to full effect. These holy beasts power attack and smite whenever possible increasing their damage still further. They use healing upon each other to keep their comrade in the fight.
Morale Charged by an angel of blessed Mitra to secure this entrance into the Vale, they fight to the death to defend its sanctity. However, if the Tower is clearly about to be overrun, one will leave the Watchtower to raise the alarm in Sanctum. The Watcher returns with army.

STATISTICS

Str 27, **Dex** 14, **Con** 25, **Int** 18, **Wis** 19, **Cha** 18
Base Atk +9; **CMB** +18; **CMD** 30 (34 vs. trip)
Feats Blind-Fight, Eschew Materials[B], Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Lightning Reflexes, Power Attack
Skills Diplomacy +13, Fly +12, Intimidate +13, Knowledge (arcana) +13, Knowledge (local) +13, Knowledge (nobility) +13, Knowledge (planes) +13, Knowledge (religion) +13, Perception +16, Sense Motive +13
Languages Celestial, Common, Infernal; Telepathy 100 ft. (only with the Captain of the Watch and each other)

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Spells A lammasu casts spells as a 7th-level oracle, but does not gain any other class abilities possessed by an oracle. It ignores all divine focus material components for spells it casts.
Smite Evil (Su): Once per day, as a swift action, the Watcher can smite evil. If the target is evil, add +4 to attack rolls and +9 to all damage rolls against the target of the smite. If the target of smite evil is an outsider with the evil subtype, an evil-aligned dragon, or an undead creature, the bonus to damage on the first successful attack increases to 18 points of damage. Regardless of the target, smite evil attacks automatically bypass any DR the creature might possess. The smite persists until the target is dead or the Watcher rests.
Guardians of the Vale (Su): All who enter the Vale are subject to a detect evil (cast as if by the lammasu). If the lammasu sense evil, they telepathically contact the Captain of the Watch.

One Fateful Day

The day of the battle (or more likely night – almost everyone that works for the PCs has darkvision) is one of the most important in the lives of the PCs. They can look back over their career and identify a few that may arguably equal it – the day they escaped from Branderscar, the day they signed the Pact of Thorns, the day they threw open the gates of Balentyne, the day they called forth darkness. This is one of those days. They know it is coming. They know that within the Vale of Valtaerna, there will be an army of faithful Mitrans and their angelic allies willing to lay down their lives to defend the town of Sanctum and the great Cathedral of Mitra Made Manifest. They must win this day.

The PCs have warning. They will likely have a pile of money from their adventures in Farholde. They can go to the great city of Ghastenhall and equip themselves with almost anything they could desire. There is no reason for our villains to be short on healing, spells, magic equipment and so forth. This is the moment to use up a big pile of resources. This is the day to do all that they can to win this battle. They must be victorious at Saintsbridge or they are done walking the Way of the Wicked.

The villains have allies. Besides their usual cohorts (is Grumblejack still with them?), they possibly have Artephius the alchemical golem (see Book Two), Trik, Nessian war hounds, an ogre mage and a medusa all fighting at their side. This is not the time to hold back with allies. We assume the PCs bring them all.

The Battle of Saintsbridge is not one tough fight. It is perhaps as many as eight or nine significant fights (depending on PC choices) in a row without the possibility of a night's rest. It is a marathon of death and slaughter. If you have a PC death or two – this is not a problem. Don't seek out character deaths but the PCs are 10th level. *Raise dead* is likely a resource they possess. PC deaths will only make the battle more memorable. Immediately give the fallen player one of the cohorts or allied monsters to play. Keep the *player* in the battle.

The characters should be 10th level on the brink of 11th. Think for a moment about that. This is almost the exact midpoint of the campaign. This is "Way of the Wicked's" center. With the battle of Saintsbridge, you have chance to make that central moment epic. Do not miss it. Be ready to give the PCs the fight of their lives.

If you, Game Master, are doing your job correctly, the PCs should arrive at the end of this battle utterly at the end of their endurance. They have should be pushed to the edge of breaking and just as defeat seemed all but assured – victory!

Running the Battle

The battle of Saintsbridge is presented in a narrative flowchart style. Rather than use an intricate wargame battle system, instead we are only concerned with events that directly impact the PCs upon the field of war.

The PCs setup the battle. They describe when the horde attacks and where they'll be during the fighting. A likely scenario is to infiltrate the Watchtower (using trickery or magic), defeat its guardians, and then throw open the gates. The horde marches into the Vale with the PCs at its fore. There they meet the hastily assembled defensive force in the open field and battle ensues. This is the scenario depicted on the map on the next page.

With every event, you pose a battlefield problem to the PCs. For example in Event 3 (see below) the problem is "A group of knights is about to mow down your troops with their deadly charge." At this point, the PCs must solve that battlefield problem. Solving the problem earns Victory Points (or VP for short). How they solve the problem is entirely at their discretion. The obvious solution is "we go and kill the knights." With that solution, you run a combat upon a portion of the battlefield.

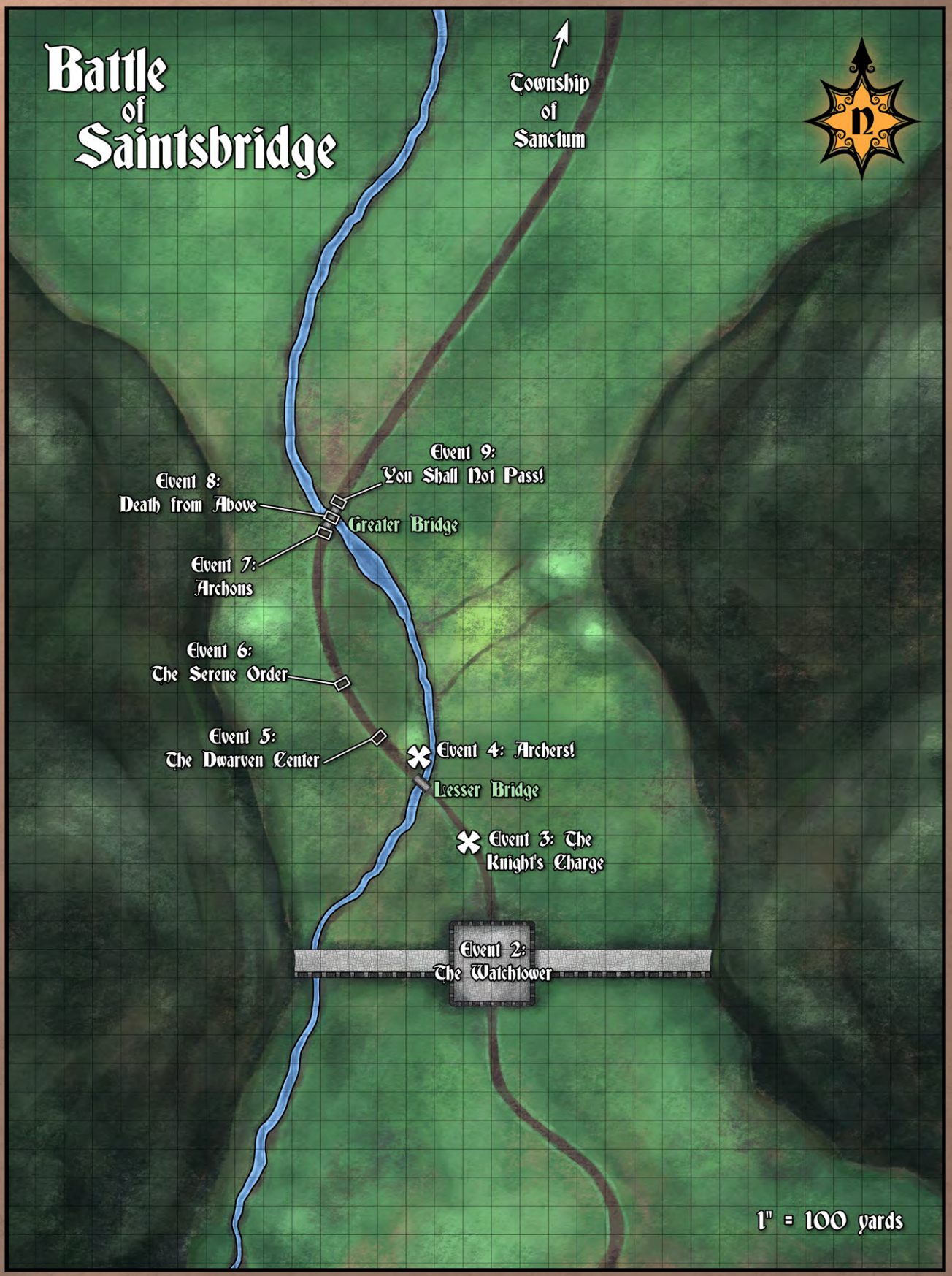
That combat is no doubt surrounded by all sort of fighting, and for color it might be fun to have the odd group of troops both friendly and enemy appear in the battle scene. Like for example, a bugbear fighting three soldiers (see page 33 for soldier stats) could stumble onto the edge of your battle. The PCs can let them fight it or perhaps even help adding a few kills to their roster. But mostly what we're concerned about is the PCs versus the knights. That's the focus.

Not every solution need directly involve the PCs. The PCs can order minions to deal with a problem. For example, the PCs could order their underlings to kill those knights. Notes will be provided in every encounter how well this works. Some problems are time sensitive. The PCs may get only one chance to solve them. Other problems may persist until they are solved. Again, we'll describe this in every encounter.

We will try to present several solutions to every battlefield problem. But ultimately, it is likely your PCs might try something truly unique that is not in the notes. Be ready for this! It is of course up to you to decide how well that solution works. There is nothing wrong, by the way, with awarding partial victory points for a solution that only partially works.

At the end of chapter three, we'll total up the number of victory points the PCs have collected and determine the results of the battle. Now – onwards to battle!

The Vale of Valtaerna
Mount Mitrandius
N
Racros Falls
Cathedral of Mitra Made Manifest
Garden of Serenity
River Aiden
Mountain of the Phoenix
Lake Larynthus
Sanctum
Farmlands
Farmlands
The Watchtower
1" = 1/2 mile


Battle of Saintsbridge
Township of Sanctum
N
Event 9: You Shall Not Pass!
Event 8: Death from Above
Greater Bridge
Event 7: Archons
Event 6: The Serene Order
Event 5: The Dwarven Center
Event 4: Archers!
Lesser Bridge
Event 3: The Knight's Charge
Event 2: The Watchtower
1" = 100 yards

Who did the PCs Bring?

First the PCs must sort out their order of battle. Who marches with them? We have presented a number of options in Act 2 above for the PCs to find allies. Perhaps you've presented them with some more (many of the sidequest suggestions from Book One Talingarde gazetteer for example talk about how to gain yet more allies).

The PCs collect victory points depending on who they managed to recruit into the fight:

5 VP: Convince the Fire-Axe to send Shagoroth Night-Mane

3 VP: Convince Prince Gaius to send his vampire spawn (only counts if the PCs attack at night)

4 VP: Convince the duergar thane to send his army (only counts if the PCs attack at night)

4 VP: Every two "actions" worth of minions you send to the battle (see the Minion management system in Book II) gains the PCs 1 VP (max of 4). If you are not using the optional minion management system, use your own best judgment if the PCs have recruited enough thugs and cutthroats to earn this benefit. As a rule of thumb, twenty minions equal one victory point.

Any NPC minions who accompany the PCs and fight alongside the PCs are not worth victory points. Instead, they help the PCs earn victory points in the events to come. However, if the PCs send some of the named NPCs to fight with other units and do not accept their aid, they can earn additional victory points. Generally such an action earns them one bonus victory point. The PCs cannot earn more than 5 bonus victory points this way.

Do they Gain the Element of Surprise?

If the PCs simply march their army towards the Watchtower, the gong rings out and the defense force has plenty of time to prepare. The PCs may even have to fight past a wall and watchtower manned not by fifty soldiers but by hundreds. This is a major tactical gaff. **-5 VPs.**

If the PCs infiltrate the Watchtower but the gong is sounded, it still takes the defense forces sometime to assemble. The PCs have time to dispatch the last of the defenders and the two armies meet in the open. **O VP.**

If the PCs manage to infiltrate the tower and slay every adversary without the gong being struck or a Watcher flying to warn the army, then the battle still happens in the open as watchmen in town spot the army rushing through the gates, but the defenders are much less prepared and more disorganized. **+3 VPs.**

Event Two: The Golems and the Gate

Problem: How does the PCs' army get past the watchtower and into the Vale?

Infiltrate the Watchtower: Run the PCs performing the infiltration mission as normal. Remember that unless the infiltrators have *undetectable alignment* or a similar effect, they are immediately detected by the Watchers.

Send human or bugbear minions: This is a grave tactical error. Minions are unprepared to deal with the Watchers or the golems. They completely fail at this mission and the gong rings out loud and true. The armies of the Vale reinforce the Saintsbridge wall with well-practiced precision. They have drilled for this a dozen times! Each knows their assigned spot on the wall. They are ready for battle as the horde approaches. Assign -5 VPs.

Send the vampire spawn: This is a more interesting solution. The vampire spawn with their mist forms can do a much better job than typical minions. Unfortunately, they are likely detected by the Watchers at the top of the tower. And the Watchers possess *searing light* that kills vampire spawn dead in droves. Still the vampire spawn can wreak havoc among the normal troops in the tower. Assign -5 VP for losing the element of surprise and +1 VP for the vampire spawn killing half of the soldiers before the Watchers destroy them.

Send Raiju the Exile: Raiju is the best choice of their minions for this job. Raiju will invisibly fly up and notice the Watchers on the roof of the tower. Very intelligent and learned in arcane matters, he will figure out they are some sort of magical guardian. He will then report back and tell our villains about the Watchers. This does not solve the problem, but neither does it raise the alarm.

Send Raiju again: If they order Raiju to attack the tower anyways, then the central question is "does detect evil sense him as evil?" If not, then he successfully infiltrates the guardrooms in mist form, kills some guards and opens the portcullis. The golems must still be defeated, but the gate is open and the alarm has not yet been raised. The PCs have kept the element of surprise at least for now. **+3 VPs.**

If he does detect evil, then the Watchers sense him, warn the Captain and while Raiju does briefly open the gate, he is swarmed by soldiers and forced to turn gaseous to flee for his life. Raiju returns to the PCs at half points and reports his failure. "It's not my fault," he explains. "Those magical beasts must have sensed me." The alarm is sounded with the portcullises still closed. The few guards that Raiju slew aren't enough to seriously inconvenience the defenses. **-5 VPs.**

Event Three:
O the Wild Charge They Made!

A line of finely dressed and battle ready Knights of the Alerion mounted on barded destriers line up and lower their lances. They prepare to charge. A cry goes out "Forth men of Mitra! And fear no darkness!" The bugbears hesitate and seem ready to break before this wall of horse and steel. Will the PCs meet the middle of their charge and break these elite ranks or will these knights mow down the horde like grass?

Problem: A group of knights is about to mow down your troops with their deadly charge.

The Knights charge in a great V formation. At the point of the spear is Sir Dallidan and with him, a personal vanguard. If the PCs can meet that point and blunt it, the knight's charge will fall into disarray and then outnumbered, the bugbears gleefully hack these men apart.

Sir Dallidan the Bold, the point of the charge CR 9

XP 6,400
Male human fighter (roughrider) 9
LG Medium humanoid
Init +8; **Senses** Perception +1

DEFENSE

AC 22, touch 14, flat-footed 18 (+4 armor, +4 Dex, +4 shield)
hp 85 (9d10+36)
Fort +8, **Ref** +7, **Will** +4

OFFENSE

Speed 50 ft.
Melee mwk lance power attack +13/+8 (1d8+12/x3) or longsword +12/+7 (1d8+12/19-20)
Ranged composite longbow (+4 Str) deadly aim +12/+7 (1d8+12/x3)
Special Attacks mounted mettle +2

TACTICS

During Combat Sir Dallidan charges with his lance at top speeds towards the largest, fiercest enemy he can find. If he must fight at range, then he does so mounted and with deadly efficiency.
Morale Sir Dallidan is reckless almost to the point of insanity. He has never retreated from anything in his life and will not do so today. Death or victory!
Base Statistics When not mounted, Sir Dallidan the Bold has Speed 30 ft; Melee longsword power attack +10/+5 (1d8+10/19-20); Ranged composite longbow (+4 Str) deadly aim +10/+5 (1d8+10/x3)

STATISTICS

Str 18, **Dex** 18, **Con** 14, **Int** 8, **Wis** 12, **Cha** 10
Base Atk +9/+4; **CMB** +13; **CMB** 27
Feats Deadly Aim, Improved Initiative, Mounted Archery, Mounted Combat, Point-Blank Shot, Power Attack, Precise Shot, Ride-By Attack, Spirited Charge, Toughness, Trample
Skills Handle Animal +12, Ride +16
Languages Common
SQ armored charger, leap from the saddle, steadfast mount +2
Combat Gear arrows (20)
Other Gear chain shirt, composite longbow (+4 Str), *heavy steel shield of arrow deflection* +2, masterwork lance, brightly colored crimson tabard with his personal crest -- a knight on horseback charging, longsword, heavy horse (combat trained) with military saddle and chain shirt barding.

Defeat the Knights: 3 VPs

Send the minions: The knights charge through any minions the PCs send after them. -1 VP but the PCs get another chance to personally defeat them.

Use magic to unhorse them and then send the minions: This works beautifully. Without their horses, these knights are just a few veteran troops ready to be overwhelmed. 3 VPs.

Charging Knights (7) CR 4

XP 1,200 each (8,400 XP total)
Male human fighter (dragoon) 5
LG Medium humanoid
Init +1; **Senses** Perception +0

DEFENSE

AC 20, touch 11, flat-footed 19 (+7 armor, +1 Dex, +2 shield)
hp 47 (5d10+20)
Fort +6, **Ref** +2, **Will** 1; +1 vs. fear
Defensive Abilities bravery +1

OFFENSE

Speed 50 ft.
Melee lance +11 (1d8+8/x3) or longsword +9 (1d8+4/19-20)
Ranged longbow +6 (1d8/x3)
Special Attacks weapon training (spears +1)

TACTICS

During Combat They charge with their lances and then attack en masse.
Morale If Sir Dallidan is slain and three of their number fall, the rest flee the field.
Base Statistics When not mounted, Charging Knights has Speed 20 ft.

STATISTICS

Str 18, **Dex** 12, **Con** 14, **Int** 9, **Wis** 10, **Cha** 12
Base Atk +5; **CMB** +9; **CMD** 20
Feats Mounted Combat, Ride-By Attack, Skill Focus (ride), Spirited Charge, Toughness, Trample, Weapon Focus (lance), Weapon Specialization (lance)
Skills Handle Animal +9, Ride +8
Languages Common
SQ armor training 1, skilled rider, spear training
Combat Gear arrows (20)
Other Gear field plate, heavy steel shield, lance, longbow, longsword, heavy horse (combat trained) with military saddle and chain shirt barding.

Knight's Destiers CR 2

XP 600
N Large animal
Init +4; **Senses** low-light vision, scent; Perception +8

DEFENSE

AC 19, touch 13, flat-footed 15 (+4 armor,+4 Dex, –1 size, +2 natural)
hp 19 (2d8+10)
Fort +8, **Ref** +7, **Will** +3

OFFENSE

Speed 50 ft.
Melee bite +5 (1d4+5), 2 hooves +0 (1d6+2)
Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 5 ft.

STATISTICS

Str 20, **Dex** 18, **Con** 21, **Int** 2, **Wis** 17, **Cha** 11
Base Atk +1; **CMB** +7; **CMD** 21 (25 vs. trip)
Feats Endurance, Run
Skills Perception +8
Gear chain shirt barding

Interlude: Danger On the BATTLEFIELD

As the PCs maneuver to face their next event, a volley of arrows falls all around them. Every PC and person travels with them gets attacked by this volley. Roll a +7 ranged attack. If hit, they take 1d8+2 points of damage.

The PCs then have six rounds of free time.

Event Four: Archers!

Problem: From a rise a cluster of archers seize the high ground. A flag goes up with the signet of the archery command and from there they begin to coordinate arrow fire into great volleys. That command must be broken!

Charge the Hill: Violence is always an option. To get into melee with the archers, the PCs must clear an open field 360 feet across (three rounds of full movement for a normal human). Sir Giles of Tell (the archer commander) spots them immediately and for three rounds the archers fire a hail of arrows at the PCs and their retinue. Teleportation, flight or horses can of course reduce the time it takes to clear this distance. If there was ever a moment to employ protection from arrows, this is it.

If our villains can cover that distance then they can engage in battle with the archery command. Defeating Sir Giles and his band of archers is worth 2 VP.

Send the Minions: This is a mission the minions can handle. Sire Giles and his men may be expert archers but they are normal enemies that the bugbears can overwhelm. A successful Ruthless check against a DC 20 results in success! Award full XP and VP for this fine use of minions.

If the minions do fail to take the archery command however, Sir Giles and his unit inflict a princely toll upon the bugbear lines. 0 VP.

Ruin their bows: You don't actually need to defeat Sir Giles and his band. With the spell *warp wood* you could ruin their bows and render them impotent upon the battlefield. That will also garner the PCs full VP and XP as the bugbears overwhelm their now defenseless position and slaughter them to a man.

Interlude: The Fire of Mitra

Half the battlefield away a cleric of Mitra (specialized in the fire domain) shoots a *fireball* at the PCs just before being skewered by a cadre of bugbears. The *fireball* erupts somewhat randomnly. Pick a PC a random and center the fireball on them. Everyone close to them also gets the blast. This is a 5d6 fireball with a save DC of 15.

The PCs then have seven rounds of free time.

Sir Giles of Tell, the finest archer in Valtaerna CR 8

XP 4,800

Male human fighter (archer) 8
NG Medium humanoid
Init +9; **Senses** Perception +13

DEFENSE

AC 18, touch 15, flat-footed 13 (+3 armor, +5 Dex)
hp 52 (8d10+8)
Fort +7, **Ref** +7, **Will** +5

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.
Melee greatsword +10/+5 (2d6+3/19-20)
Ranged *oathbow* deadly aim +15/+10(1d8+13/x3)
Special Attacks expert archer +1, trick shot (disarm, sunder)

TACTICS

During Combat Sir Giles much prefers archery to melee, obviously. He will rain down death on his enemies and only resort to melee if forced. He picks the most deadly seeming warrior amongst his foes and uses the oath of his oathbow against them.
Morale Sir Giles of Tell has a family in the town of Sanctum. He realizes with one glance that this horde will spare no one. He fights to the death. However, if he believes he can succesfully flee a losing battle, he will. But he will be back in Encounter Nine helping defend the last bridge.

STATISTICS

Str 14, **Dex** 20, **Con** 12, **Int** 10, **Wis** 16, **Cha** 8
Base Atk +8/+3; **CMB** +10; **CMD** 25
Feats Deadly Aim, Far Shot, Greater Weapon Focus (longbow), Improved Initiative, Manyshot, Point-Blank Shot, Precise Shot, Weapon Focus (longbow), Weapon Specialization (longbow), Rapid Shot
Skills Climb +12, Perception +13, Survival +14, Swim +12
Languages Common
SQ hawkeye 2
Combat Gear arrows (40)
Other *oathbow*, greatsword, studded leather

Elite Archers (10) CR 3

XP 800 each (8,000 XP total)

Male human fighter (archer) 4
NG Medium humanoid
Init +4; **Senses** Perception +5

DEFENSE

AC 18, touch 14, flat-footed 14 (+4 armor, +4 Dex)
hp 26 (4d10+4)
Fort +5, **Ref** +5, **Will** +2

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.
Melee spear +5 (1d8+1/x3)
Ranged longbow deadly aim +7 (1d8+6/x3)
Special Attacks trick shot (disarm)

TACTICS

During Combat They follow Giles lead and try to stay away from melee. If that fails, a few draw spears and try to keep the enemies at bay, so that the rest of the archers can shoot them.
Morale Dedicated but not fanatic, If reduced to 7 hp or less these archers flee. If Sir Giles and half their number fall they flee.

STATISTICS

Str 12, **Dex** 18, **Con** 12, **Int** 10, **Wis** 12, **Cha** 10
Base Atk +4; **CMB** +5; **CMD** 19
Feats Deadly Aim, Point-Blank Shot, Precise Shot, Rapid Shot, Weapon Focus (longbow), Weapon Specialization (longbow)
Skills Climb +6, Perception +5, Survival +8, Swim +6
Languages Common
SQ hawkeye 1
Combat Gear arrows (40)
Other Gear chain shirt, longbow, spear

Event Five: The Dwarven Center

Line by line, the bugbears crash through the ranks of Talirean infantry. Mostly, the hearty yeomanry and the common soldiery are unprepared for the brutal ferocity of these shaggy northern monsters. Again and again the bugbears rip into their enemies and teach them a lesson in slaughter.

But then the slaughter ceases. At the center of the Talirean lines the bugbears meet their match. Sturdy dwarven soldiers hew down the beasts with hammer and axe. They bellow in old dwarven "Axes of the dwarves! The dwarves are upon you!" Their number is few but their worth upon the battlefield is great. And pinning them all together is the dwarven thane at their center.

The PCs have a choice. Let the slaughter continue and hope for a victory by weight of numbers or try to break the dwarven confidence by personally dealing with their thane and his retinue.

Problem: Slay the dwarven thane and his retinue.

Dwarven Priestess, Bride of Father Mountain CR 7

XP 3,200
Female dwarf cleric 8
LG Medium humanoid (dwarf)
Init +1; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +4

DEFENSE

AC 20, touch 11, flat-footed 19 (+7 armor, +1 Dex, +2 shield)
hp 60 (8d8+24)
Fort +7, **Ref** +3, **Will** +12

OFFENSE

Speed 20 ft.
Melee warhammer +8/+3 (1d8+2/x3)
Ranged light crossbow +7 (1d8/19-20)
Special Attacks channel positive energy 5/day (DC 14, 4d6), holy lance 1/day (4 rounds)
Domain Spell-Like Abilities (CL 9th; concentration +12) acid dart 7/day (1d6+4 acid), touch of good 7/day
Cleric Spells Prepared (CL 9th; concentration +12)
4th—dismissal (DC 18), divine power, freedom of movement, holy smite[D] (DC 18)
3rd—dispel magic, magic circle against evil[D], prayer, searing light, stone shape
2nd—hold person (DC 16), lesser restoration, silence (DC 16), soften earth and stone[D], spear of purity (DC 16)
1st—bless, bless water, comprehend languages, detect evil, protection from evil[D], sanctuary (DC 15)
0 (at will)—detect magic, light, read magic, stabilize
D domain spell; Domains Earth, Good

TACTICS

During Combat She focuses on healing and supporting the Thane.
Morale She stands with her thane to the end.

STATISTICS

Str 14, **Dex** 12, **Con** 12, **Int** 10, **Wis** 18, **Cha** 11
Base Atk +6/+1; **CMB** +8; **CMB** 19 (23 vs. bull rush, trip)
Feats Armor Proficiency (heavy), Combat Casting, Extra Channel, Toughness
Skills Heal +15, Knowledge (religion) +11, Spelcraft +11
Languages Common, Dwarven
SQ aura, dwarf traits
Combat Gear bolts (20)
Other Gear field plate, healer's kit, heavy steel shield, silver holy symbol, light crossbow, warhammer

Durhan One-Stroke, The Dwarven Thane CR 9

XP 6,400
Male dwarf fighter (weapon master) 9
LG Medium humanoid (dwarf)
Init +1; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +2

DEFENSE

AC 20, touch 11, flat-footed 19 (+10 armor, +1 Dex)
hp 103 (9d10+54)
Fort +10, **Ref** +4, **Will** +5; +2 vs. poison, spells and spell-like abilities
Defensive Abilities mirror move (greataxe +2)

OFFENSE

Speed 20 ft.
Melee +2 *greataxe* power attack +16/+11 (1d12+20/19-20/x3)
Ranged throwing axe +10 (1d6+4)
Special Attacks reliable strike 1/day, wpn training (greataxe +2)

TACTICS

During Combat Thane Durhan is a dwarf with a big axe. He uses it at every opportunity, power attacking.
Morale Death before dishonor! Fight to the last!

STATISTICS

Str 18, **Dex** 12, **Con** 18, **Int** 11, **Wis** 14, **Cha** 8
Base Atk +9/+4; **CMB** +13; **CMD** 24 (26 vs. disarm, sunder; 28 vs. bull rush, trip)
Feats Cleave, Cleaving Finish, Great Cleave, Greater Weapon Focus (greataxe), Improved Cleaving Finish, Improved Critical (greataxe), Power Attack, Toughness, Weapon Focus (greataxe), Weapon Specialization (greataxe)
Skills Climb +10, Swim +10
Languages Common, Dwarven
SQ dwarf traits, weapon guard (greataxe +2)
Combat Gear throwing axe (5)
Other Gear full plate, +2 greataxe (ancestral treasure of the dwarves)

Dwarven Nobles (6) CR 5

XP 1,600 each (9,600 XP total)
Male dwarf fighter (two-weapon warrior) 6
LG Medium humanoid (dwarf)
Init +3; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +1

DEFENSE

AC 19, touch 13, flat-footed 16 (+6 armor, +3 Dex)
hp 45 (6d10+12)
Fort +6, **Ref** +5, **Will** +3; +2 vs. fear, poison, spells, spell-like abilities
Defensive Abilities bravery +2, defensive flurry +1

OFFENSE

Speed 20 ft.
Melee **mwk** battleaxe +10/+5 (1d8+4/x3) or shortsword +9/+4 (1d6+4/19-20) or mwk battleaxe +9/+4 (1d8+5/x3) and shortsword +8/+3 (1d6+5/19-20)
Ranged javelin +9 (1d6+2)
Special Attacks twin blades +1

TACTICS

During Combat Hold the line and hit the enemy with your axe! That summarizes dwarven tactics for this battle.
Morale The line must be held at all costs! Fight to the end! Axes of the dwarves!

STATISTICS

Str 14, **Dex** 17, **Con** 12, **Int** 10, **Wis** 12, **Cha** 8
Base Atk +6/+1; **CMB** +8; **CMD** 21 (25 vs. bull rush, trip)
Feats Double Slice, Improved Two-Weapon Fighting, Two-Weapon Fighting, Weapon Focus (battleaxe), Weapon Focus (shortsword), Weapon Specialization (battleaxe), Weapon Specialization (shortsword)
Skills Climb +7, Swim +7
Languages Common, Dwarven
SQ dwarf traits
Combat Gear javelins (3)
Other Gear masterwork battleaxe, breastplate, shortsword

Charge into battle: Defeating the dwarves breaks the dwarven center. 3 VP.

Send minions: Sending the minions unled against the dwarves is a mistake. The dwarves cut them to ribbons, hewing them where they stand. -1 VP for every group of minions except...

Send the duergar: The dwarves and the duergar engage in the some of the most brutal slaughter seen in this battle. They fight to almost the last dwarf. When the fighting is over not a living duergar can be found. But the dwarven center is broken. 1 VP.

The players get no break between this fight and the next.

Event Six: The Serene Order

Behind the dwarven center, vicious combatants confidently move through your ranks slaughtering anyone unfortunate enough to get in their way. They are led by one man, a bald headed warrior who with his bare hands breaks necks and sends his foes scattering. Our villains get to personally watch him shatter the spine of a bugbear subchieftain. Every moment that passes with them unchecked, these monks of the Serene Order take a deadly toll upon your horde.

Acolytes of the Serene Order (8) CR 3

XP 800 each (6,400 XP total)
Male human monk 4
LG Medium humanoid
Init +3; **Senses** Perception +9

DEFENSE

AC 17, touch 17, flat-footed 13(+3 Dex, +1 dodge, +1 monk, +2 Wis)
hp 30 (4d8+12)
Fort +5, **Ref** +7, **Will** +6; +2 vs. enchantment
Defensive Abilities evasion

OFFENSE

Speed 40 ft.
Melee unarmed strike +7 (1d8+1) or unarmed strike flurry of blows +6/+6 (1d8+1)
Ranged light crossbow +6 (1d8/19-20)
Special Attacks flurry of blows, stunning fist (4/day, fatigued)

TACTICS

During Combat The monks do their best to keep up with Brother Nicodemus and support him as best they can
Morale The Serene Order fights to the last

STATISTICS

Str 12, **Dex** 16, **Con** 12, **Int** 12, **Wis** 14, **Cha** 10
Base Atk +3; **CMB** +4; **CMD** 21
Feats Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Improved Unarmed Strike, Stunning Fist, Toughness, Weapon Finesse, Weapon Focus (unarmed strike)
Skills Acrobatics +10, Climb +8, Escape Artist +10, Perception +9, Stealth +10, Swim +8
Languages Common
SQ fast movement, ki pool (4 point, magic), maneuver training, slow fall 20 ft.
Combat Gear bolts (20)
Other Gear light crossbow, robe of the Serene Order

Brother Nicodemus of the Serene Order CR 9

XP 6,400
Male human monk 10
LG Medium humanoid
Init +2; **Senses** Perception +15

DEFENSE

AC 17, touch 17, flat-footed 14 (+2 Dex, +1 dodge, +2 monk, +2 Wis)
hp 85 (10d8+40)
Fort +9, Ref +9, Will +9; +2 vs. enchantment
Defensive Abilities improved evasion; Immune disease

OFFENSE

Speed 60 ft.
Melee unarmed strike power attack +9/+4 (1d10+8) or unarmed strike flurry of blows +12/+12/+7/+7 (1d10+4)
Ranged sling +9 (1d4+4)
Special Attacks flurry of blows, stunning fist (10/day, DC 17, fatigued, sickened)

TACTICS

During Combat Brother Nicodemus tries to use his superior mobility to attack enemy spellcasters hoping to defeat them before they can do more damage.
Morale A religious fanatic fighting for the only home he has ever known, Brother Nicodemus fights to the death.

STATISTICS

Str 18, **Dex** 14, **Con** 14, **Int** 10, **Wis** 14, **Cha** 10
Base Atk +7/+2; **CMB** 14; **CMD** 28
Feats Cleave, Cleaving Finish, Deflect Arrow, Dodge, Great Cleave, Improved Cleaving Finish, Improved Unarmed Strike, Mobility, Power Attack, Spring Attack, Stunning Fist, Toughness
Skills Acrobatics +15 (+25 jump), Climb +17, Knowledge (religion) +13, Perception +15, Swim +17
Languages Common
SQ fast movement, high jump, ki pool (7 points, lawful, magic), maneuver training, slow fall 50 ft., wholeness of body
Combat Gear bullets (10)
Other Gear sling, robe of the Serene Order

Problem: Defeat the monks of the Serene Order. 3 VP.

Send Minions: No good. They are defeated -1 VP and you may try again.

Send Vampire Spawn: If they survive, the vampire spawn are effective against monks. They two units do a good job of annihilating each other. 2 VP.

Interlude: Rock!

Seige engines are not destined to play a large role in this battle. The few that were in Sanctum are scarcely in position before they are overrun and ripped to shreds by the PC's horde. But they do get to fire a volley or two and right now one of those shots is coming right at the party.

Randomly pick a PC. That PC and everyone within five feet of him are being targeted by a catapult stone. First the catapult crew commander must roll a d20+3 (his base attack bonus + intelligence). If he beats a 15, the rock lands dead square. The PC and everyone within five feet of him take 6d6 damage (DC 15 Reflex save for half).

If the stone misses roll 1d8 and 1d4. The d8 is the direction. The d4 is the number of squares it is off target.

Contegar and Scutus, Shield Archons CR 10

XP 9,600 each (19,200 XP total)

LG Large outsider (archon, extraplanar, good, lawful)

Init +5; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; Perception +15

Aura aura of menace (DC 18), *magic circle against evil*

DEFENSE

AC 28, touch 10, flat-footed 27 (+9 armor, +1 Dex, +4 natural, +5 shield, –1 size) (+2 deflection vs. evil)

hp 112 (9d10+63)

Fort +13, **Ref** +7, **Will** +8; +4 vs. poison

DR 10/evil; Immune electricity, petrification; **SR** 21

OFFENSE

Speed 40 ft., fly 90 ft. (good); 30 ft., fly 60 ft. in armor

Melee +3 shortspear +16/+11 (1d8+10)

Space 10 ft.; Reach 10 ft.

Special Attacks transpose ally

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 9th; concentration +11)

Constant--*magic circle against evil*

At will--*aid, greater teleport* (self plus 50 lbs. of objects only), *message*

1/day--*disrupting weapon, divine power, shield other*

TACTICS

During Combat These two large angels are just large enough to completely block the entrance to the bridge. And they will not leave their post. They will have cast shield other on each other and it will easily outlast the duration of this battle. On the first round of the battle against our villains, they use their 1/day divine power spell-like ability. This grants them a +3 luck bonus on attack rolls, weapon damage rolls, Strength checks and Strength-based skill checks. They also gain 9 temporary hit points. Further, whenever they make a full-attack action, they make an additional attack at their full base attack bonus. This effect last for nine rounds. Other than that, they hold their ground and fight till defeated.

Morale These bastions of good fight to the bitter end. They will defend their post till they are forced to return to the celestial realms or until the battle is won.

STATISTICS

Str 20, **Dex** 13, **Con** 25, **Int** 14, **Wis** 16, **Cha** 15

Base Atk +9; **CMB** +15; **CMD** 26 (30 vs. bull rush and trip)

Feats Combat Reflexes, Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Shield Focus, Stand Still, Weapon Specialization (shortspear)[B]

Skills Diplomacy +14, Fly +7, Intimidate +14, Knowledge (religion) +14, Perception +15, Sense Motive +15, Stealth +1, Survival +15

Languages Celestial, Draconic, Infernal; truespeech

SQ spear and shield, stability

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Spear and Shield (Su) At will as a free action, a shield archon can transform his hands into a +1 tower shield and a +3 shortspear, or either individually, or back to hands again. He cannot transform both hands into shields or both into shortspears. A shield archon never takes the typical –2 penalty on attack rolls while wielding a tower shield. A shield archon's weapons cannot be disarmed, but they can be sundered. If a shield archon loses his spear or shield, he can manifest a new one as a full-round action. When a shield archon is slain, these two items fade away—they cannot be looted or wielded by any other creature.

Stability Shield archons receive a +4 racial bonus to CMD when resisting a bull rush or trip attempt.

Transpose Ally (Su) Once per day as a standard action, a shield archon can teleport to the location of a willing (or unconscious) ally and immediately teleport that ally to the archon's previous position, in effect switching places with the ally. The archon must have line of effect to the target.

Event Seven: The Angels on our Side

The PCs have ten rounds to rest and recuperate and then the press towards the final bridge begins. At the entryway to the bridge are two glowing creatures large as ogres encased in armor and wielding great tower shields. Any within reach of their shortspears are skewered. Like twin towers they deny access to the greater bridge.

Problem: Defeat the Shield Archons upon the bridge.

Send minions: An abject failure. Nothing the PCs have will touch these divine beasts. Really, with this, the time of falling back on minions is over. This event and the next two all happen on the bridge. Our villains must fight these three battles in quick succession and they must win them all or the battle will likely end in a draw at best.

Defeat the Archons: If the PCs can destroy these two archons, then they gain access to the bridge and 3 VPs.

Event Eight: Death from Above

As Act IV and Act V make apparent, the Vale of Valtaerna is lousy with good celestials. Over the years, that population has served alongside and rarely even fallen in love with mortals. The result is that there are more aasimar (those with celestial blood) in Sanctum than probably all of the rest of Talingarde put together. The population is significant enough that there are at least one hundred aasimar civilians in the town of Sanctum. From these numbers, Ara Mathra carefully watches for those worthy to join the elite order of knights who rank among this vale's finest defenders. With this event, those knights arrive on the battlefield and hunt down our villians.

From up in the sky comes a screech. A half dozen knights in full armor swoop down on griffons with coats the color the brightest dawn. This vanguard of Mitran elite dives right at our villains as they cross the greater Saintsbridge.

Problem: Aasimar paladin knights on celestial griffons are trying to kill you!

Fight!: There is only one solution to this problem. There is no time to order minions to this task and no way to escape short of teleporting off the battlefield entire. These aasimar will hunt the PCs down wherever they may be.

Defeating the knights is worth 4 VPs.

Celestial Griffons (6) CR 5

XP 1,600 each (9,600 XP total)

NG Large magical beast
Init +2; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision, scent; Perception +12

DEFENSE

AC 17, touch 11, flat-footed 15 (+2 Dex, +6 natural, –1 size)
hp 42 (5d10+15)
Fort +7, **Ref** +6, **Will** +4
DR 5/evil; Resist Cold, Acid and Electricity 10; **SR** 10

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft., fly 80 ft. (average)
Melee bite +8 (1d6+3), 2 talons +7 (1d6+3)
Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 5 ft.
Special Attacks pounce, rake (2 claws +7, 1d4+3)

TACTICS

During Combat
Morale

STATISTICS

Str 16, **Dex** 15, **Con** 16, **Int** 5, **Wis** 13, **Cha** 10
Base Atk +5; **CMB** +9; **CMD** 21 (25 vs. trip)
Feats Iron Will, Skill Focus (Perception), Weapon Focus (bite)
Skills Acrobatics +10, Fly +6, Perception +12; Racial Modifiers +4 Acrobatics, +4 Perception
Languages Common (cannot speak)

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Smite Evil (Su): Once per day, as a swift action, the half-celestial can smite evil as a paladin. This adds +0 to hit and +5 to damage against the evil foe. The smite persists until the target is dead or the half-celestial rests.

Blessed Knights (6) CR 5

XP 1,600 each (9,600 XP total)

Male Aasimar paladin 6
LG medium humanoid
Init +0; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +8
Aura Courage (10 ft.)

DEFENSE

AC 21, touch 10, flat-footed 21 (+9 armor, +2 shield)
hp 51 (6d10+18)
Fort +10, **Ref** +5, **Will** +10
Immune fear, diseases; **Resist** acid 5, cold 5, electricity 5

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft. (20 ft. in armor)
Melee mwk lance (smiting charge w/ magic weapon and sun metal in effect) +12/+7 (3d8+18+1d4 fire/x3) or mwk lance +9/+4 (1d8+4+1d4 fire/x3) or longsword +8/+3 (1d8+2/19-20x2)
Special Attacks smite 2/day

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 6th)
At will – *detect evil*
1/day – *daylight*

Paladin Spells (CL 3rd)
1st – *magic weapon, sun metal*

TACTICS

Before Combat As they flyi into battle the knights cast magic weapon (duration: 6 minutes) and sun metal (duration: 6 rounds on their lances. These spells are already noted in the stat blocks

During Combat These blessed knights are trained to use their charge attacks to full effect. They charge their opponents and then circle about and charge again. They will do this as often as they can.

Morale These knights fight to the death.

STATISTICS

Str 14, **Dex** 10, **Con** 14, **Int** 10, **Wis** 14, **Cha** 16
Base Atk +6; **CMB** +8; **CMD** 18
Feats Mounted Combat, Ride-by Attack, Spirited Charge
Skills Diplomacy +9, Knowledge (religion) +4, Perception +8, Ride +9
Language Common
SQ aura, lay on hands (6/day), mercy (sickened, dazed)
Gear masterwork full plate, heavy steel shield, masterwork lance, longsword

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Smite Evil (Su) Once per day, a paladin can call out to the powers of good to aid her in her struggle against evil. As a swift action, the paladin chooses one target within sight to smite. If this target is evil, the paladin adds +3 to her attack rolls and adds +6 to all damage rolls made against the target of her smite. If the target of smite evil is an outsider with the evil subtype, an evil-aligned dragon, or an undead creature, the bonus to damage on the first successful attack increases to +12 damage. Regardless of the target, smite evil attacks automatically bypass any DR the creature might possess.

In addition, while smite evil is in effect, the paladin gains a +3 deflection bonus to his AC against attacks made by the target of the smite. If the paladin targets a creature that is not evil, the smite is wasted with no effect.

The smite evil effect remains until the target of the smite is dead or the next time the paladin rests and regains her uses of this ability.

Event Nine: You Shall Not Pass!

Your PCs have made it! This is the last fight of the Battle of Saintsbridge. Victory is within sight. The battle field is littered with the dead and everywhere is to be heard the cries of the dying. This has been a savage battle. The bugbears are brutes with no regard for life. The priests and holy warriors are fanatics who will not retreat under any circumstances. The battle fought between these two camps has been a brutal slaughter.

This battle has likely been fought at night (thanks to their duergar and vampire allies). This means the PCs have no real sense of how well they are doing. All that they can know is that the killing has not relented for what seems like hours.

A final group of defenders holds the far side of the greater bridge. If this bridge falls there is nothing between the PC's horde and the village of Sanctum but open field. This bridge is the key to victory.

But this group of defenders is not any ordinary band of soldiers. These are the priests of Mitra backed by holy warriors. These four priests are senior member of the Order of Saint Macarius. These are the disciples of the head of the order Earnan MacCathlain himself (who appears in Act V below).

The last order they received from MacCathlain was "I think I have a way to defeat these invaders, but I need time. Hold them off for as long as you can. Every second you can buy is needed.

Holy Warriors (8) — CR 3

XP 800 each (6,400 XP total)
Human warrior 5
LG Medium humanoid
Init +0; **Senses** Perception +3

DEFENSE

AC 18, touch 10, flat-footed 18 (+6 armor, +2 shield)
hp 37 (5d10+10)
Fort +5, **Ref** +1, **Will** +1

OFFENSE

Speed 20 ft.
Melee masterwork longsword +10 (1d8+3/19-20x2)
dagger +8 (1d4+3/19-20x2)

TACTICS

During Combat These last few faithful soldiers do their best to hold the bridge and do not sell their lives cheaply.
Morale These religious fanatics hold this bridge to the bitter end.

STATISTICS

Str 16, **Dex** 11, **Con** 12, **Int** 10, **Wis** 10, **Cha** 12
Base Atk +5; CMB +8; CMD 18
Feats Alertness, Cleave, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (longsword)
Skills Climb +7, Intimidate +9, Perception +3, Sense Motive +4, Swim +7
Languages Common
Gear masterwork longsword, dagger, breastplate, heavy steel shield, tabard of the holy order

The Priests of Mitra — CR 8

XP 4,800 each (19,200 XP total)
Human cleric 9
LG Medium humanoid
Init +1; **Senses** Perception +8

DEFENSE

AC 22, touch 11, flat-footed 21 (+9 armor, +1 Dex, +2 shield)
hp 70 (9d8+30)
Fort +9, **Ref** +5, **Will** +11

OFFENSE

Speed 20 ft.
Melee mwk morningstar +9/+4 (1d8+2) or dagger +8/+3 (1d4+2/19–20)
Ranged mwk light crossbow +8 (1d8/19–20) or dagger +7 (1d4+2/19–20)
Special Attacks channel positive energy 5/day (DC 14, 5d6), holy lance (4 rounds, 1/day)

Domain Spell-Like Abilities (CL 9th, concentration +13)
7/day—rebuke death, touch of good

Cleric Spells Prepared (CL 9th, concentration +13)
5th—dispel evil[D], righteous might
4th—air walk, freedom of movement, holy smite[D], spell immunity
3rd—daylight, dispel magic, magic circle against evil[D], prayer, searing light
2nd—aid, bull's strength, cure moderate wounds[D], delay poison, spiritual weapon, status
1st—bless, detect chaos, divine favor (2), protection from evil[D], shield of faith
0 (at will)—create water, detect magic, detect poison, stabilize
D domain spell; **Domains Good,** Healing

TACTICS

During Combat They cast righteous might on round one and then split between attacking along side and supporting the holy warriors.
Morale These priests will die here before they admit defeat.

STATISTICS

Str 14, **Dex** 12, **Con** 14, **Int** 8, **Wis** 18, **Cha** 10
Base Atk +6; **CMB** +8; **CMD** 19
Feats Armor Proficiency (heavy), Craft Magic Arms and Armor, Extra Channel, Shield Focus, Toughness, Vital Strike
Skills Diplomacy +5, Heal +10, Knowledge (religion) +10, Perception +8, Sense Motive +8, Spellcraft +11
Languages Common
SQ healer's blessing
Gear full plate, heavy wooden shield, masterwork morningstar, masterwork light crossbow with 10 bolts, dagger, cloak of resistance +1, healer's kit

"And if I do not see you again on this plane, my brothers, know that I have never been more priviledged than the day that you appointed me the head of this order. Till all is light."

They answered only "Till all is light."

And then they marched here.

Problem: Break the last knot of defenders holding the far side of the greater bridge.

Defeating the priests of Mitra and their holy warriors is worth 5 VPs. And with that, the Battle of Saintsbridge is at an end.

Event Ten:
An Hour of Battle, Days of Slaughter

The battle is over but who won? Total up the victory points now. The PCs could have gotten victory points from:

5 VP Gaining Fire-Axe's aid (Shagoroth Night-Mane)

3 VP Allying with Prince Gaius Vestromo

4 VP Allying with the Duergar Thane

4 VP Your own minions (1 VP per two "actions")

2 VP Defeating the Clay Golems

1 VP Killing Arthis Fidelis, Captain of the Watchtower

1 VP Defeating the 12 Holy Warriors in the Watchtower

2 VP Slaying the 50 Watchtower soldiers (1 VP per 25)

2 VP Slaying the Watchers

3 VP Gaining the Element of Surprise

-5 VP The Watchtower is unbroken as the battle begins

3 VP Defeating the Knights (Event 3)

2 VP Defeating Sir Giles and his archers (Event 4)

3 VP Defeating the Dwarven Center (Event 5)

3 VP Defeat the Serene Order (Event 6)

3 VP Defeat the Shield Archons (Event 7)

4 VP Defeat the blessed knights (Event 8)

5 VP Defeat the Priests of Mitra (Event 9)

Total Possible: 50 VP

Less than 20 VPs Defeat

The Horde is broken and the PCs barely escape with their lives (and perhaps not even all of those depending on how the fights went). They can still salvage something by sneaking into the Vale and destroying the three sacred fires and slaying Ara Mathra. But they must accomplish all this without having control of the Vale.

Game Master's Notes: This truly changes the complexion of the adventure for the next two acts. Both of the following acts are written assuming that the PCs do eventually win. If their army is destroyed, then doubtless the army did considerable damage (perhaps even wrecking the Watchtower).

That damage may allow the PCs to gain access to the Vale in the chaos. The adventure changes from the PCs sitting in their captured town planning their next move to hidden partisans hiding in the nearby mountains plotting their next strike. The statistics still work and the PCs can complete this mission. It's just much harder.

20-29 VPs Partial Defeat

You inflict terrible losses on the armies of the Vale. You fight all the way to the last bridge and that proves to be the bridge too far. You are repulsed and forced to flee Your battered army camps just outside the Vale. Tomorrow you must try again. You have one last chance to win.

30-39 VPs Hard Fought Victory

Victory! But at terrible cost. The rag tag remnant of your forces rampage into Sanctum and burn the town to the ground. Your forces, bloodied and furious at the resistance they encountered, commit countless atrocities upon the people of Sanctum. The PCs have no choice in this matter. They have little control of this battered, rampaging army for almost twenty four hours after the battle.

Finally, our villains regain control and take stock. More than half the bugbears are dead. If the PCs committed the allies (duergar or vampires) to a battle, they were wiped out to a man. If the PCs committed their own minions to the battle, their own organization suffers a -3 Survivability from the losses.

Game Master's Note: This is the assumed victory condition. Nothing in later acts needs be changed.

Story Award: Award your PCs a CR 10 (9,600 XP) reward for winning the battle.

40-49 VPs Victory

As a Hard Fought Victory but with much less casualties. Nearly 75% of the bugbears are still alive. You regain control of the survivors much more rapidly and can actually take some prisoners and learn the status of the Vale after your victory (see Act IV for more details). Any allies you committed take 50% casualties but still remain. Your minions suffer a -1 Surviviability.

Story Award: Award your PCs a CR 11 (12,800 XP) reward for winning the battle.

50 VPs Flawless Victory

This level of victory is virtually impossible to achieve. This represents the PCs almost singlehandedly defeating the defenders of Valtaerna. They fought every battle either personally or using the correct troops. They allied with everyone who could be allied and they built up their own organization to its maximum strength. Truly, Valtaerna has been overwhelmed. 90% of the bugbears are alive. Allies who were committed largely recover. Your horde marches into Sanctum and claims it for their own. The town is your! Will you burn it to the ground or leave it intact? The choice is entirely the PCs.

Story Award: Award your PCs a CR 12 (19,200 XP) reward for their meticulous execution of this battle.

Troubleshooting the Battle

The Battle of Saintsbridge represents a complex feat of Game Mastering and there is much that can go wrong. Here I try to provide you with some guidance in case of problems.

My PCs don't want to Attack Valtaerna. They have some other plan like sneaking in and poisoning a well.

A key part of this mission is leaving no living witnesses. Poisoning a well may kill some of the three thousand people of Sanctum, but it won't kill everyone. Still, a mass poisoning might soften them up. Award a victory point or two if it's a really good idea. But the battle still needs to happen.

My PCs aren't ready for this fight. They don't have enough healing/scrolls/allies/etc.

We haven't yet introduced the grizzled bugbear commander Shagoroth Night-Mane as a real NPC (see Act IV). He's just been in the background and is assumed to be leading his hundred and fifty bugbears into battle. If the PCs aren't taking the battle seriously and are not preparing adequately have Shagoroth step in and reality check his alleged masters.

He says something like: *"The Vale of Valtaerna is a stronghold of the Church of Mitra. When we attack it, the fanatics who guard this place aren't going to just hand us the keys to the Cathedral. They are going to fight to the last and sell their lives as dearly as they can manage. And they won't be alone. Who knows what celestial abominations will be fighting alongside them. We need to be ready for anything. YOU, my lords, need to be ready. Or we'll be carrying your corpses back to the Fire-Axe."*

Wait. Eight battles in a row. Are you kidding me? Isn't this going to get boring?

First of all, it's not necessarily eight battles. The PCs can delegate a few to their minions and still emerge victorious. But, yes, this act is centered around many battles in a row. Keep it moving. Keep up the pressure. Keep the action frantic and have random bits of chaos coming at the PCs from every direction. This is a battle. This is madness and death on every side.

This one battle may take a couple of sessions to run and that's okay. Keep good notes on spells that have been used, powers that have been expended and hit points. Track everything. Make all the PC's preparations mean something. This will either be their finest hour or their greatest defeat. Either way, it will be a memorable moment of gaming. Isn't that what this is all about?

Why don't the PCs get victory points for Izevel or Raiju (or Grumblejack or Artephius for that matter)?

Victory points are only awarded for units you recruit and victories you win. Raiju and Izevel help accumulate victory points by fighting with the PCs side as NPC allies.

The PCs have six or more allies. There is no way I can run all these guys and keep up with the opposition!

Good point. Don't try. Delegate. Give Izevel to a PC. Print out her stat block and hand it to a PC and say "You are also commanding the medusa." Simple as that. Same goes for any other NPC you don't want to run.

My PCs are steamrollering through this battle! I thought this was supposed to be tough?

Add more soldiers. Add more archers. Add more knights and archons and priests. Keep attacking them. Do not relent. Keep at them until they are at the end of exhaustion. Use every spell slot. Use up every potion. Use up every wand and scroll. And then just as they think they can take no more, spring the last encounter on them and then ... Victory! That is the goal.

Your descriptions don't match where my PCs want to go in the battle. Should I really force them to attack the bridges?

Don't force them. Adapt. An archer battle doesn't have to happen on one particular ridge. It could happen anywhere. Be flexible and listen to what your PCs are saying. Let their decision matter but don't let their decisions allow them to escape the excitement and danger of this battle.

My PCs don't want to lead the army from the front. They prefer to lead from the rear.

As long as they accompany the army into battle it doesn't matter where they are in the battle lines. Just adapt the description to reflect whether they are in the front or taking up the rear. If the PCs don't go with their army into the field, crush it and send it back to them in ruins. Let them regroup and try again with them at the fore. The Vale of Valtaerna will not fall without their blood and leadership.

My party is barreling straight towards a TPK (total party kill). What do I do?

Give them a few rounds between fights to recover. Have them discover a cache of healing potions on a fallen foe. Keep them in the fight! But do not relent on the pressure.

ACT FOUR: THREE MONTHS OF TERROR

This act deals with the occupation of the Vale of Valtaerna and the destruction of its many wonders.

THE ENVIRONS OF THE VALE

The day before the battle, the Vale of Valtaerna was a very picture of peace. It was the first day of winter. A light dusting of fresh fallen snow failed to hide the resplendent greenery of the vale. Most of the vale even today is forested. This is not the wild broadleaf forest of the Caer Bryr. This is a pine forest. Perfectly straight conifers grow in tightly packed clusters. They so perfectly devour the light that little grows on the forest floor. There is only a mat of pine needles and moldering cones.

Still these forests are rich with life. Where ever a pine tree has fallen, mushrooms reveal themselves covering dead wood logs in thick mats. The mushrooms emerge in a riot of color – reds, blues and oranges being quite common.

Squirrels and small roe deer patrol the forest, making their way much as they always have. Birds dwell in profusion in this isolated vale and many of those seen here are found nowhere else. Small thrushes and starlings flutter between the trees hunting small bugs. The woodpeckers of the vale are to be found here in great numbers red-crested and otherwise black and white.

Even though a town of three thousand people share the vale with all this animal life, it is not over-hunted or threatened. Most of the vales inhabitants are priests and their assistants. They have little time for hunting. What food is not grown here is brought in via trading caravans from Ghastenhall. Thus the vale flourishes without being strained by its inhabitants.

At the center of the vale is the beautiful lake Parynthus (pronounced PEAR-ren-thus) fed by mountain melt water and teeming with fish. The plentiful char of the lake are good eating – their fatty meat being somewhere between lake trout and salmon. The lake itself is a placid pool rarely disturbed by great gales in this sheltering vale and never quite cold enough to freeze.

At the northern end of the vale, great waterfalls flow from Mount Mitrandius and pour into the vale feeding the lakes and streams. It is this water that is the lifeblood of all living things in the vale. The falls are brilliant, sending forth flocks of rainbows through the clouds of mist. They are also ice cold, only recently melted from mountain snow.

The vale is surrounded by great mountain peaks that rise high enough that they never entirely lose their snow caps. The mountains too are not lifeless. Shaggy mountain goats dwell in the peaks walking along impossibly steep trails to graze upon the plants that sprout from the stone. Small ground squirrels also clamber among the rocks scratching for pine nuts and acorns.

Birds too find shelter here in the mountains. Goshawks, wrens, chiffchaffs and pipits hide amongst the alpine greenery. In particular a small population of Valtaernian hawks makes their aeries in the high peaks that wall the vale.

These impressive hawks with plumage of vibrant red are much prized by falconers and wizards alike. It is said within their heritage flows the blood of the firebird and thus they possess a uniquely magical nature. What is certain is that if you can capture an impressive specimen it easily commands hundreds of gold in Ghastenhall.

All in all the Vale of Valtaerna was a jewel. It was an oasis of peace and serenity near the very heart of Talingarde. Whenever the cares and strife of the major cities of the south wore upon the population, they could arrange a pilgrimage here. They could find solace in the endless glow of the phoenix's mount. They could take comfort that blessed Mitra loves them enough to provide such a garden of serenity.

This was how the vale was yesterday.

Today that is all changed. Today the Vale of Valtaerna belongs to the Knot of Thorns and their underlings. Today bands of murderous bugbears hunt the forest eager to find survivors from the slaughter of Saintsbridge. Today vampires and duergar patrol the night eager for blood and vengeance. Today all is shadow and death.

The day after the conquest, winter comes to Valtaerna. Snow falls thick and soon everything is white and gray. The passes into the vale become almost inaccessible. Winter has cut off this vale from the world and for one season, this vale becomes the playground of the Knot.

The sky darkens after the snow storm and even at noon, the days are never brighter than twilight. Light sensitive creatures can now move about the vale all day without penalty. Vampire spawn must still avoid the height of day but they find their night hunting hours greatly expanded. Perhaps this is not the hand of any dark god or prince of hell. Perhaps this is merely a sign of an early winter.

Or perhaps Asmodeus watches the deeds of our villains and is well pleased.

Event One: Lords of the Vale

After the battle is over (and we assume victorious) the PC's horde and minions raid the now vulnerable vale and wreak bloody slaughter upon the civilians within. The rest of this adventure is concerned with locations within the Vale that the minions cannot pillage on their own.

If the players still have control of the horde, they can profit from the pillaging of Sanctum. They can order valuables brought to them or do a bit of looting themselves. The bugbears won't turn over everything they find. They will steal about half of it, orders or not. Still, the PCs share will be a nice pile of ransacked silver, jewelry, silk tapestries and religious items worth about 12,500 gp. In addition to that there are 21,000 gp worth of magic items that they can find. The author recommends tailoring this haul to your PCs. They've earned a great reward after Saintsbridge.

But if you want a pregenerated trove, here it is:

A fine walking stick of black ebony wood with a silver cap (a *lesser rod of metamagic (extend)*)

Magnificent leather gloves made out of the iridescent scales of some obviously magical beast (*gloves of swimming and climbing*)

A strange looking iron ring covered with arcane symbols (*a ring of maniacal devices*)

A beautiful scroll case containing clerical scrolls of *cure critical wounds* x2, *death ward, protection from energy, deadly juggernaut, arrow of law, bull's strength* and *weapon of awe*.

+2 heavy steel shield adorned with the insignia of Asmodeus. It is beaten and slightly charred. It hangs in a church beneath the placard "Behold the shield of the last Asmodean knight in Talingarde. Having died by fire, he now burns forever."

There is also the matter of prisoners. Virtually no soldiers were taken prisoner. They fought almost to the last man to defend their homes and churches. But almost 2,000 civilians were taken prisoner.

The village reeve and mayor, Timon Lotte, bows at the PC's feet (if given the chance) and says abjectly *"Oh great and terrible lords – we surrender. The township of Sanctum and the Vale of Valtaerna is yours. I beg you, free the women and children. They are no threat to you. Spare them and with the spring they will spread the word of your great power and awesome victory to every corner of Talingarde. All will fear you."*

Timon bows and scrapes. After seeing the carnage, he is sure that he will be killed. All that he hopes is that his daughters and grand children may escape the holocaust that is to come. He will say anything, promising ransoms that are likely to never come and rewards he has no way of fulfilling.

Be cautious here, Game Master. Dwelling on the fate of these civilians could very likely cross the line for many gaming groups. Graphic depictions of genocide, torture and abuse are nobody's idea of a good time. Be brief. Be concise. Get this done with and let's move on to business of being dastardly pulp villains.

But do not forget this. The PCs have come here on a mission of murder and destruction. They have been ordered to leave no survivors. Do they violate those orders or are the good people of Sanctum put to the sword? And if they do obey those orders to the letter, do they ever have a moment of regret? Was there a time not so long ago that each and every one of our PCs was also rounded up by the witch hunters of the inquisition and brought to trial. Now that the shoe is on the other foot are our villains capable of even a moment's regret?

The PCs need not do the dirty business themselves. The two bugbear commanders – Hekkarth Head-taker (CE bugbear barbarian 5) and Shagoroth Night-mane (NE bugbear fighter 7) are willing to get to the job of butchering the populace.

Hekkarth has a rather grisly suggestion. *"Let me build a pyramid of skulls in the center of town, my lords. With the deep chill of winter it will freeze into a solid block of blood and ice. When we leave and the Mitrans retake this sewer pit, they will find our mark and know that it was the Head-takers that did this!"*

Shagoroth is a bit more restrained and yet his suggestion is ultimately even more terrible. *"There will be time to build pyramids out of skulls, Hekkarth. Before we sever the heads perhaps we should learn what is inside them first. The Vale is not yet entirely ours. A light still burns on the Mountain of the Phoenix and the Cathedral is unconquered. I could begin torturing the survivors to see what they know."*

If given permission, Shagoroth takes over the town hall and transforms into a palace of nightmares. Whatever you imagine in your darkest dream is going on in there, what the Night-mane actually does make it look like a children's tale. The screams never cease.

After a week, Night-mane reports what he has learned. We'll discuss that in detail in Event Two below.

Manning the Watchtower

If the watchtower survived the battle of Saintsbridge intact, the PCs may deploy disguised minions to make the Vale seem business-as-usual. This is a good idea. During winter the vale gets almost no traffic, but not quite none. The occasional desperate pilgrim or wayward caravan will approach the tower. They are used to waiting for a watch captain (who changes from time to time) to come out and wave them through.

If you are using the minion system, by spending two actions a week, the watchtower can be fully staffed with minions in disguise. They let the travelers in and then ambush them. If the watchtower is unstaffed or insufficiently staffed then there is a 25% chance each week of there being a witness who sees the condition of the Vale and escapes to talk about it. One action is enough to at least alert the PCs that they've been noticed.

This murder and banditry is a money making enterprise. Every week, the watchtower manages to seize 1d6 prisoners (mostly human commoners) and (1d8-1)*100 gp in coinage and trade goods. This is after the minions have already stolen a decent share for themselves! If our villains instead of hording the loot and prisoners and say to their minions something to this effect: "Amuse yourself with both. Just remember that at the end of winter, no witnesses" then immediately award a +2 to Loyalty.

Story award: For manning the watchtower award a CR 9 (9,600 XP reward).

The Ruined Township of Sanctum

After the sack by the bugbear horde, the town of Sanctum is a burned out husk of its former glory. The bugbears have largely made camp inside the less burned building and are busy (when they're not engaged in acts of brutal horrific murder) feasting on the great piles of foodstuffs the villagers had socked away for the winter. Ale and meat are plentiful and so the bugbears are contented. This is even better than the Castle Westkirk. At Westkirk they were all crammed into one comparatively small fortress. Here they have room to stretch out and enjoy themselves.

The Reeve's manor at the far end of Sanctum escaped the mayhem relatively unscathed and makes a fine base for our villains. The manor is not particularly richly appointed but it is comfortable and there are plenty of fine soft feather beds. Master Lotte and his wife Arabella would once or twice a season make a trip to Ghastenhall and buy fine clothes and jewelry. There is about 3500 gp in finery all difficult to sell in Ghastenhall because it is monogrammed with *TL* and *AL*.

Event Two: Torture and Vengeance

Night-Mane reports after a week. If the PCs failed to learn any of the common knowledge from page 26, they learn it now. He also has this to say:

"The torture's gone well. Oh, how talkative all my new friends have been. First, you missed somebody. The head of the Order of Macarius wasn't in the battle -- Earnan MacCathlain. No idea where he is but I bet he's up to no good. Some of the people feel like he's betrayed them. But most believe he must have a plan to defeat us and liberate the vale. But no one seems to know what that plan is exactly.

"Second, there is an actual phoenix on top of that mountain. It's as big as a house, it breathes fire and its been there for as long as anyone can remember. Good luck with that.

"Third, everyone agrees there are angels in the Gardens of Serenity. How many, they ain't sure. But angels. And if you make it past the labyrinth, there are probably more angels in the Cathedral. There is something powerful in this valley they believe will defeat you. It's name is Ara Mathra. I'm not sure what it is. Maybe that's the phoenix's name."

What also becomes apparent is that there are two places in the Vale where bugbears cannot go. No bugbear is anxious to climb the Mountain of the Phoenix (which clearly has a temple up there) and the few bugbears who hopped in a boat and paddled down the River Aiden never came back (the Legion Archons at G-1 got them).

Likewise, the Headtaker and Night-Mane were ordered to invade the vale not fight angels or whatever the hell is up there. They aren't going. They will hold the town and search the woods for survivors, but they aren't fighting magic fire birds the sizes of houses or angels. They never agreed to that sort of nonsense.

The duergar are also of no help here. After the battle is won, if he survives then Prince Zargun demand that all the dwarvish prisoners be given to him (there are less than a hundred). If this is done, then Prince Zargun declares the PCs friends of the duergar and says they will always be welcome in Zhaazen-Kryr. Then Prince Zargun and his retinue leave with the prisoners, going back to his father in triumph. It will take weeks for all these dwarves to face the fire. And Prince Zargun is sure with the prestige he has gained that he can overthrown his father and become the next thane. He cackles gleefully at the idea.

The vampire spawn are happy to haunt the vale all winter long as long as the feeding is good.

Raiju and Izevel as well as any other cohort (Grumblejack and Trik for example) will accompany the PCs.

Event Three: Escape!

This event can happen any time after the conquest of the Vale of Valtaerna. A group of nineteen rag tag survivors who managed to escape the slaughter of Saintsbridge try to fight their way out of the vale in hopes of pushing through to Ghastenhall, finding aid and returning with the spring to reclaim their home. They attack the Watchtower at a time when the PCs happen to be there. Or perhaps they stumble across the PCs just as they are making their break. Regardless, the PCs have one chance to stop this ragtag assembly.

Their leader claims and acts the part of a noble from Farholde. He is actually a con artist named Robert the Rapier who came here to bunk some trusting priests and merchants out of their gold. He has largely succeeded at that mission and now that he has false contracts that will make him wealthy, he desperately wants to escape this place. He has sung a song of escaping the Vale and returning with an army of Mitrans to a group of survivors. He hopes that these dupes will help him fight his way out of this death trap.

His contracts if brought to a merchant house in the Goldquarter of Ghastenhall authorize payment of 12,000 gp to a Lord Roderick of Farholde. Having recently spent seven months in Farholde, the PCs will know there is no such noble. The PCs can play the role as easily as Robert.

Sir Roland, Unhorsed Knight CR 4

XP 1,200
Male human fighter (dragoon) 5
LG Medium humanoid
Init +1; **Senses** Perception +0

DEFENSE

AC 20, touch 11, flat-footed 19 (+7 armor, +1 Dex, +2 shield)
hp 47 (5d10+20)
Fort +6, **Ref** +2, **Will** 1; +1 vs. fear
Defensive Abilities bravery +1

OFFENSE

Speed 20 ft.
Melee longsword +9 (1d8+4/19-20)
Ranged longbow +6 (1d8/x3)
Special Attacks weapon training (spears +1)

TACTICS

During Combat Bravely Sir Roland charges at the enemy with his longsword drawn. Unhorsed, he fights as best he can.
Morale Facing the choice of slaughter and torture at the hands of the bugbear horde or death in combat trying to escape, Sir Roland fights to the end.

STATISTICS

Str 18, **Dex** 12, **Con** 14, **Int** 9, **Wis** 10, **Cha** 12
Base Atk +5; **CMB** +9; **CMD** 20
Feats Mounted Combat, Ride-By Attack, Skill Focus (ride), Spirited Charge, Toughness, Trample, Weapon Focus (lance), Weapon Specialization (lance)
Skills Handle Animal +9, Ride +8
Languages Common
SQ armor training 1, skilled rider, spear training
Combat Gear arrows (20)
Other Gear field plate, heavy steel shield, longbow, longsword

"Lord Roderick of Farholde", Robert the Rapier CR 10

XP 9,600
Male Human rogue 11
N Medium humanoid
Init +5; **Senses** Perception +15

DEFENSE

AC 22, **touch** 15, **flat-footed** 17 (+5 armor, +5 Dex, +2 shield)
hp 60 (11d8+11)
Fort +5, **Ref** +13, **Will** +8
Defensive Abilities evasion, imp. uncanny dodge, trap sense +3

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.
Melee +1 *rapier* +14/+9 (1d6/18–20)
Ranged +1 *light crossbow* +14/+9 (1d8+1/19–20)
Special Attacks sneak attack +6d6 plus 6 bleed

TACTICS

During Combat Roderick is mostly interested in avoiding combat, but if it comes to that, he will gladly sacrifice those who follow him to save his own skin. He supports his followers with his crossbow. If cornered and force to fight in melee, he uses his rapier to deadly effect, trying always to maneuver for flanking.
Morale If death looks imminent and reduced to 15 hit points or less, he surrenders and begs for his life. Robert could actually become a servant of the Knot. Greedy to a fault, Robert is easy to corrupt with the promise of wealth.

STATISTICS

Str 8, **Dex** 20, **Con** 12, **Int** 10, **Wis** 14, **Cha** 14
Base Atk +8; **CMB** +7; **CMD** 22
Feats Agile Maneuvers, Deadly Aim, Deceitful, Iron Will, Rapid Reload, Stealthy, Vital Strike, Weapon Finesse
Skills Acrobatics +19, Bluff +20, Diplomacy +15, Disable Device +30, Disguise +22, Escape Artist +22, Intimidate +10, Knowledge (local) +10, Linguistics +5, Perception +15 (+20 to find traps), Sense Motive +15, Sleight of Hand +10, Stealth +23
Languages Common, Dwarven, Goblin
SQ rogue talent (bleeding attack, finesse rogue, resiliency, slippery mind, trap spotter), trapfinding +5
Gear +1 *mithral chain shirt*, +1 *buckler*, +1 *light crossbow* with 10 bolts, +1 *rapier*, *belt of incredible dexterity* +2, *cloak of resistance* +1, disguise kit, masterwork thieves' tools, noble's garb, 10 gp in costume jewelry, 13 gp, four forged contracts guaranteeing trade monopolies in Farholde (signed)

Father Rafael, priest of Mitra CR 8

XP 4,800
hp 70 each (see page 45 above)

Varden Halfbeard, dwarven noble CR 5

XP 1,600
hp 45 each (see page 41 above)

Herman and Stanzer, acolytes of the serene order CR 3

XP 800 each (1,600 total)
hp 30 each (see page 42 above)

Three Holy Warriors CR 3

XP 800 each (2,400 XP total)
hp 37 each (see page 32 below)

Four Elite Archers CR 3

XP 800 each (3,200 total)
hp 26 each (see page 40 above)

Six Soldiers of the Watch CR 1/2

XP 200 each (1200 XP total)
hp 13 each (see page 33 below)

The Mountain of the Phoenix

This great spire of stone rises from Lake Parynthus and ascends almost seven hundred feet from the surface of the lake. Night and day and even in rain or snow, a great fire burns atop its peak. It gives no obvious hint of how you should ascend its height.

Any captive prisoner, from a captured officer to the most humble of peasants, knows that this is the Mountain of the Phoenix and that it has only two occupants: The-Flame-That-Sings, an angel of fire, and The-Fire-That-Never-Dies, a phoenix. Every true priest of Mitra must climb the spire and solve the riddle of the flame. This is common knowledge in the Vale.

The truth is that the Mountain of the Phoenix guards one of the three sacred flames of Mitra that burn in the Valley (the second is in the center of the labyrinth in the Gardens of Serenity and the third is the heart of Ara Mathra; see below). There are indeed only two occupants – a peri and a phoenix. Together they rank amongst the most deadly foes our villains will face in this entire vale.

Ascending the Mount

Climbing the Mountain of the Phoenix is intended to be an exercise in patience and fearlessness. The spire is actually covered in ledges and projections that make it easy to climb if it is closely examined and taken slowly. It is only a DC 10 to climb the mountain on a clear day if the novices will go slowly and take their time.

The novices who would be clerics of Mitra must face their fear of heights and climb its height to the spire. If they succeed at the riddle above, they need not climb down. The phoenix ferries them back. A few novices manage to fall in the lake and only once has a foolish novice in his eagerness to get to the top rushed ahead and fallen to his death.

Of course, the PCs are neither novices nor are they here during spring. It is winter and the mountain is covered in ice and snow and wild winds stir up around the spire unpredictably. Ascending in these conditions is a DC 25 climb check. Climbing seven hundred feet under such conditions is likely impossible without magic.

Even employing magic there is danger. Everyone approaching within one hundred feet of the spire's peak activates a powerful ward. This ward casts *greater dispel magic* upon any flight magic or levitation spells, attempting to send the intruders hurtling down the mountain side to their death.

The Three Sacred Flames of Valtaerna

There are three holy fires that burn in the Vale of Valtaerna but why should our villains care? Most obviously, while the two lesser fires burn (those on Phoenix Mountain and in the Garden of Serenity) the heart of the Cathedral of Mitra Made Manifest will be denied to them by an impenetrable wall of fire. So, if they do not extinguish the flames, Ara Mathra (see Act V) will survive their purges. But there is a deeper reason.

These three sacred flames answer the mystery of why almost all divine spellcasters in Talingarde come from the Order of Saint Macarius. It was Macarius himself who solved the riddle of the flames and was the first mortal to complete the threefold test. Anyone of pure heart who places their hand in the fire of all three flames will become a divine spellcaster of Mitra. This is why the vale is so well defended. And it is for this reason that the Vale is perhaps the most sacred place on this plane to Mitra. If our villains could extinguish those three flames, then a great victory would have been won over the forces of good.

This ward, put in place by Macarius himself long ago, was intended to make the mountain difficult to invade both by the forces of evil and by those too impatient to take the test. The ward does not affect creatures with the intrinsic ability to fly. But it will try to dispel summoned creatures used as mounts.

It is possible (though difficult) to spot the ward. With a DC 30 Perception test, it is possible to notice a slight shimmering in the air. It can be disabled but only by finding its source inside the Temple of the Phoenix (see M-1 below). If the Ward is ever disabled it will be permanently dispelled.

STORY AWARD: Ascending the Mountain of the Phoenix either by magic (and surviving the ward) or by climbing is worth a CR 11 reward (12,800 XP). Note: this includes the XP awarded for defeating the trap.

The Anti-Flight Ward CR 11

Type magical; **Perception** DC 30; **Disable Device** DC 30

EFFECTS

Trigger approaching with a hundred feet of the mountain's peak (*alarm*) **Reset** automatic (it affects a given target only once every 24 hours)

Effect spell effect (*greater dispel magic* as if cast by an 11th level caster; a targeted dispel that affects flight or levitation magic first); multiple targets (everyone who approaches within a hundred feet of the mountain's peak)

NOTE: This ward does not affect any good-aligned outsider or the phoenix Suchandra

The Mountain's Peak

M-1 Temple of the Phoenix

This glistening white marble temple can be seen upon the side of the phoenix's mountain spire for miles around. But only when from the mountain's peak can its true artistry and magnificence be appreciated. Covered in breathtaking bas relief showing the deeds of angels and phoenixes, this columned temple is a masterpiece of classic architecture, perfect in its proportion. Below a beautiful picture of a phoenix it reads in celestial: "Praised be Suchandra, praised be the First." It is also the home of an eternal guardian of living flame, The-Flame-That-Sings.

The-Flame-That-Sings is a peri, a descendant of fallen angels who in long ages past betrayed Mitra. She atones for the sins of her blood by attending the phoenix and seeing that the sacred flame of Mitra forever shines. Perhaps if she performs this task long enough, Mitra will forgive her ancestors and they will be redeemed from the eternity of suffering they have brought upon themselves. But for now The-Flame-That-Sings carries on, performing her duties, guarding the temple and filling it with songs as beautiful as they are mournful.

But sadness is not what fills her heart as our villains enter the temple. She has seen the slaughter in the Vale below and ached to fly to their aid. As Sanctum burned, her oath stayed her hand and kept her here at her post. But now the butchers have come to her mountain domain. She is about to have guests. She will greet them with fire and her song will become a battle-cry.

If The-Flame-That-Sings is slain her fiery scimitar is extinguished and fades. However she leaves behind a robe of rare fire-silk and golden jewelry worth 2300 gp.

The temple itself is a single chamber with west-facing double doors that open upon a pillared landing with a commanding view of the entire Vale. This is the easiest point on the peak to reach. If the PCs want another landing, they must ascend another sixty feet to access M-3.

In the center of the temple is a magical sphere of crystal suspended in a pedestal of marble. This is the focus for the ward. If the magic can be defused by disrupting the magic (requiring a DC 30 Disable Device check) then the sphere is quite valuable – worth 1500 gp.

Of course, you can always just smash it.

There is a small door at the back of the temple that leads to M-2, the stairs that lead upwards towards the Guardian Flame and the nest of the Phoenix.

The-Flame-That-Sings, a peri CR 14

XP 38,400

NG Medium outsider (good, native)

Init +7; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision, smoke sight; Perception +26

DEFENSE

AC 30, touch 18, flat-footed 22 (+7 Dex, +1 dodge, +12 natural)
hp 180 (19d10+76)
Fort +12, **Ref** +18, **Will** +17
DR 10/cold iron and evil; **Immune** electricity, fire; **Resist** acid 10, cold 10; **SR** 25

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft., fly 90 ft. (good)
Melee +2 *flaming burst* scimitar +27/+22/+17/+12 (1d6+8/18-20 plus 1d6 fire), 2 wings +20 (1d6+3 plus burn)
Special Attacks burn (2d6, DC 23), whirlwind dance
Spell-Like Abilities (CL 15th; concentration +23)

Constant—*fire shield* (warm shield)
At will—*aid*, flame jump (see below), *pyrotechnics* (DC 20), *scorching ray*
3/day—*fireball* (DC 21), *flame strike* (DC 23), *wall of fire*

TACTICS

During Combat The-Flame realizes that many foes she faces are likely to be resistant to fire and thus she prefers to lead with her *wall of fire* (hopefully cutting the enemy in half) and her whirlwind dance. If she detects that a foe she is fighting is not resistent to fire then she uses *fireball* and *flame strike* to quickly remove them from the battle.

If badly wounded, she uses flame jump to travel to the Guardian Flame (M-3) and there uses its healing properties to restore herself. If the enemies are still in her temple. She then returns and reignites the battle. She will use this strategy again and again until she is either dead or the enemies are purged from her mountain top.

Morale Fanatically and eternally dedicated to defending the phoenix, The-Flame-That-Sings fights to the death.

STATISTICS

Str 22, **Dex** 24, **Con** 19, **Int** 21, **Wis** 19, **Cha** 26
Base Atk +19; **CMB** +25; **CMD** 43
Feats Combat Expertise, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Great Fortitude, Improved Disarm, Iron Will, Mobility, Power Attack, Spring Attack, Whirlwind Attack
Skills Acrobatics +29, Diplomacy +30, Fly +33, Heal +23, Knowledge (planes) +27, Knowledge (religion) +24, Perception +26, Perform (sing) +30, Sense Motive +26, Spellcraft +27, Stealth +29
Languages Auran, Celestial, Common, Draconic, Elven, Ignan; telepathy 100 ft.
Gear 2300 gp in jewelry and fire silk

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Flame Jump (Sp) The-Flame can enter any fire equal to it's size or larger and travel any distance to another fire in a single round, regardless of the distance between the two. This ability otherwise functions as greater teleport (caster level 14th), but the peri can transport only itself and up to 50 pounds of objects.

Smoke Sight (Su) The-Flame can see through fire, fog, and smoke without penalty.

Whirlwind Dance (Su) Once per day as a full-round action, The-Flame can spin in an ever-faster, whirling dance, transforming itself into a spinning vortex of flame 10 to 40 feet high for up to 9 rounds. This ability functions as the whirlwind ability (DC 26 Reflex save), but any creature that comes in contact with the whirlwind or is caught inside it takes 2d6+6 points of fire damage and is subject to The-Flame's burn special attack. The save DC is Dexterity-based.

M-2 Mountain Stairs

These small narrow marble stairs ascend up the side of the mountain. They are steep but not dangerous.

M-3 The Guardian Flame

This is a great circle of white marble surrounded by eight ancient stones. The circle has the look of great antiquity about it and does not seem to match any other sort of architecture common to Talingarde. The white stone is not charred or covered with soot and in its center burns a great roaring fire. The fire does not produce any smoke instead shedding a great light that brightens and warms the entire top of the mountain.

If anyone with the party has light sensitivity or takes damage from daylight (for example if one of the PCs is a vampire) then this light causes them some discomfort. They are effectively dazzled (-1 to attack rolls and sight-based perception checks) while the fire yet burns.

A great magical flame eternally burns within this stone circle. It is this fire that partially sustains the great Wall of Flame called up by Ara Mathra (see Act V below). Destroying the Guardian Flame weakens the wall. It also notifies the Oracle of Mitra (see G-4 below) and Ara Mathra (2-9) that the first of the three Sacred Flames has died.

The Oracle rushes to tell Ara Mathra. Ara Mathra is saddened because it means Suchandra is likely dead but he tells the Oracle not to lose hope. If they can but weather this storm the fire will be restored.

Any good celestial who touches the flame immediately receive the benefit of a *cure critical wounds* (4d8+7 hit points are restored).

Anyone else who tries to tamper with the Guardian flame instead earns the wrath of Mitra.

The Wrath of Mitra	CR 13
Type magical; **Perception** DC 31; **Disable Device** DC 31	
EFFECTS	
Trigger tampering with the sacred flame; **Reset** automically resets every 24 hours	
Effect spell effect (maximized *fireball*, 60 fire damage, DC 14 Reflex save for half damage); multiple targets (all targets in a 20-ft.-radius burst)	

While the phoenix dwells in this Vale, this fire cannot be put out by any mortal means. The Guardian Flame is effectively a sort of artifact sustained by the life force of the phoenix.

If the phoenix is truly slain or forced to leave (see below), then the fire's power is greatly weakened. Still, it can only be extinguished with unholy water or casting *desecrate* upon it. A successful Knowledge (religion) (DC 30) will learn this revelation.

Story Award: Extinguishing the Guardian Flame is worth a CR 12 award (19,200 XP)

M-4 The Nest of the Phoenix

The very peak of the mountain is the nest of the legendary phoenix Suchandra The-Fire-That-Never-Dies. Suchandra is ancient beyond all understanding and was the first speaking resident of this vale. From the top of this stone spire, he has watched tribes come and go. The forest recedes and then slowly reclaims the vale.

Suchandra is male and yet still guards a nest full of eggs. These were laid long ago by his mate who has long departed this vale and this world. He remains watching them. There are thirteen eggs in the nest. Twelve of them are large but not too dissimilar from normal eggs, a pearlescent white. These will in time hatch as fire-birds (as rocs with the fire-infused creature template). But the thirteenth egg does not seem like an egg at all. It looks like a perfectly smooth ruby that is warm to the touch. This is a true phoenix's egg and it is a treasure of legend.

When the world is right, this egg will hatch into another true phoenix. Suchandra does not know exactly when this will come to pass but has waited for centuries for this moment to arrive.

The firebird eggs could fetch a 1,000 gp apiece in a large city where they could be sold to an animal handler who could hatch them (for example in Ghastenhall). The phoenix egg is a prize without equal. There is no merchant in Talingarde with enough money to pay what is worth. To sell such a treasure and receive its true value would mean leaving this world and going to one of the great bazaars of the multiverse. In the City of Brass, you could sell this and get a fair price. That would easily be a quarter million gold. More likely the otherworldly merchant would instead trade it for another great magic item. What it would take to travel to the City of Brass and conduct such a deal is doubtless worthy of its own adventure but is beyond the scope of this book.

A more immediate use would be to drain its magic. A wizard could use dark magic to extract raw magical essence powerful to make 50,000 gp worth of magic items. That would of course kill the baby phoenix within the egg but surely that is a small price to pay for such power.

The Fury of the Phoenix

As the PCs defeat The-Flame-That-Sings with her last breathe, she reaches out with her mind and speaks to Suchandra. "I have failed you. They are coming." With that, the phoenix knows (if he didn't know before) that his mountain home is invaded and that his dearest friend in all the world has been murdered. The phoenix is not a beast that is easy to anger. Mostly it is content to sit atop is mountain guarding its nest waiting for the time when another true phoenix will finally be born. For centuries it has risen above the cares of the world below. But no longer. The phoenix is difficult to anger. But our villains have managed.

The mountain top shakes. There is a cry like the voice of a thousand eagles. The Guardian Flame flares up turning into a roaring bonfire. Anyone with ten feet of the flame takes 2d6 fire damage (DC 15 Relfex save for half).

Suchandra rings its nest in a *wall of fire*. That wall will persist for eighteen rounds. It then leaves its nest and begins to circle the mountaintop looking for the murderers of The-Flame-That-Sings. Anyone it finds it strafes with flame using its quickened *wall of fire* and *fire storm*.

If they survive that onslaught then it dives at them, activating its *shroud of flame* and using it talons and bite to fantastic effect. It will try and grab someone and drop them not into the lake but so that they hit upon the steep sides of the mountain spire a few hundred feet below.

Even if slain, it will not cease these onslaughts. Unless its corpse is disintegrated, it will rise from its own ashes and seek vengeance once more. The fury of the phoenix is terrible indeed!

There is only one way to stop this furious attack. If the PCs can make it pass the *wall of fire* that surrounds its eggs, threatening the eggs will cause the phoenix to stop its rampage. The eggs (in particular the true phoenix egg) are its legacy, its treasure and its duty.

The phoenix is an honorable creature. If the PCs threaten its eggs, the phoenix can be forced to swear an oath that it will leave Talingarde and never return. It abides by this oath. It cries out in celestial in a voice that the whole vale can hear *"Ara Mathra I am sorry but I must go. Know that I am forever your friend. May we meet again when all is light."*

If the PCs destroy its eggs, the phoenix's fury is inconsolable. It attacks with all its might until they or it are eternally dead. It does not just kill such a villain. It burns their bodies to fine ash and scatters the ashes across the four corners of the world.

Suchandra, The-Fire-That-Never-Dies, a phoenix CR 15

XP 51,200

NG Gargantuan magical beast (fire)

Init +11; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., *detect magic*, *detect poison*, low-light vision, *see invisibility*; Perception +37

Aura shroud of flame (20 ft., 4d6 fire, DC 25)

DEFENSE

AC 28, touch 14, flat-footed 20 (+7 Dex, +1 dodge, +14 natural, –4 size)

hp 210 (20d10+100); regeneration 10 (cold or evil)

Fort +17, **Ref** +19, **Will** +14

Defensive Abilities self-resurrection; **DR** 15/evil; **Immune** fire **SR** 26

Weaknesses vulnerable to cold

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft., fly 90 ft. (good)

Melee 2 talons +24 (2d6+8/19–20 plus 1d6 fire) and bite +24 (2d8+8 plus 1d6 fire)

Space 20 ft.; **Reach** 20 ft.

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 18th)

Constant—*detect magic*, *detect poison*, *see invisibility*

At will—*continual flame*, *cure critical wounds*, *greater dispel magic*, *remove curse*, *wall of fire*

3/day—*fire storm* (DC 24), *greater restoration*, *heal*, *mass cure critical wounds*, quickened *wall of fire*

TACTICS

During Combat Suchandra prefers to take wing and to fight while in flight. The phoenix uses its quickened wall of fire and fire storms to strafe the top of the mountain. There is after all nothing atop the mountain that the Phoenix values that is harmed by flame. Before it closes into melee it prefers to first cast *greater dispel magic* against a foe, hoping to remove any magical defenses.

Morale Suchandra defends the nest fanatically and fights to the death against any it thinks will steal or damage the true phoenix egg.

STATISTICS

Str 27, **Dex** 25, **Con** 20, **Int** 23, **Wis** 22, **Cha** 22

Base Atk +20; **CMB** +32; **CMD** 50

Feats Blinding Critical, Combat Reflexes, Critical Focus, Dodge, Flyby Attack, Improved Critical (talon), Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Mobility, Quicken Spell-Like Ability (*wall of fire*)

Skills Acrobatics +30, Diplomacy +26, Fly +28, Intimidate +26, Knowledge (nature plus any one other) +26, Perception +37, Sense Motive +26; **Racial Modifiers** +8 Perception

Languages Auran, Celestial, Common, Elven, Ignan

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Self-Resurrection (Su) A slain phoenix remains dead for only 1d4 rounds unless its body is completely destroyed by an effect such as *disintegrate*. Otherwise, a fully healed phoenix emerges from the remains 1d4 rounds after death, as if brought back to life via *resurrection*. The phoenix gains 1 permanent negative level when this occurs, although most use *greater restoration* to remove this negative level as soon as possible. A phoenix can self-resurrect only once per year. If a phoenix dies a second time before that year passes, its death is permanent. A phoenix that dies within the area of a *desecrate* spell cannot self-resurrect until the *desecrate* effect ends, at which point the phoenix immediately resurrects. A phoenix brought back to life by other means never gains negative levels as a result.

Shroud of Flame (Su) A phoenix can cause its feathers to burst into fire as a free action. As long as its feathers are burning, it inflicts an additional 1d6 points of fire damage with each natural attack, and any creature within reach (20 feet for most phoenixes) must make a DC 25 Reflex save each round to avoid taking 4d6 points of fire damage at the start of its turn. A creature that attacks the phoenix with natural or non-reach melee weapons takes 1d6 points of fire damage (no save) with each successful hit. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Mountain of The Phoenix
= 10 ft.
N
Dispel Magic Sphere
M-4
M-3
M-1
Lake Parynthus
M-3
M-2
M-4
M-1

Gardens of Serenity
= 30 ft.
Cathedral of Mitra Made Manifest
G-6
G-5
G-4
The Labyrinth
G-3
Gardens
G-2
G-1
River Aiden
N

THE GARDENS OF SERENITY

G-1 The River Dock

A broad stone dock that juts out into the river. There are frequent posts for tethering river craft to the pier. The dock is guarded by six legion archons eager to defend this sacred place. Anything that approaches the dock has *detect evil* cast on it. Any evil creatures get attacked by a barrage of flaming javelins. Anyone who does not detect evil gets warned away. Only if the warning is not heeded does the barrage of flaming javelins come.

Legion Archons (6) CR 7

XP 3,200 each (19,200 XP total)
LG Medium outsider (archon, extraplanar, good, lawful)
Init +1; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft. *detect evil*, low-light vision; Perception +13
Aura aura of menace (DC 17)

DEFENSE

AC 23, touch 11, flat-footed 22 (+9 armor, +1 Dex, +3 natural; +2 deflection vs. evil)
hp 76 (8d10+32)
Fort +10, **Ref** +3, **Will** +8; +4 vs. poison, +2 vs. evil
DR 10/evil; **Immune** electricity, petrification; **SR** 18

OFFENSE

Speed 40 ft., fly 90 ft. (average)
Melee +1 *flaming burst* greatsword +13/+8 (2d6+5/17-20 plus 1d6 fire)
Ranged +1 *flaming* javelin +10 (1d6+4 plus 1d6 fire)
Special Attacks flames of faith
Spell-Like Abilities (CL 8th; concentration +11)

Constant—*detect evil*, *magic circle against evil*
At will—*aid*, *continual flame*, *greater teleport* (self plus 50 lbs. of objects only), *message*
3/day—*align weapon*, *mirror image*, *versatile weapon*

TACTICS

During Combat As soon as enemies are detected the archons cast *mirror image* upon themselves.They prefer to use flight to keep their distance and rain down flaming javelins. If that becomes impossible or if it looks like their foes might enter the Garden, then they resort to using their greatswords.
Morale They fight to the death to defend this sacred vale.

STATISTICS

Str 16, **Dex** 12, **Con** 19, **Int** 10, **Wis** 15, **Cha** 17
Base Atk +8; **CMB** +11; **CMD** 22
Feats Improved Bull Rush, Improved Critical (greatsword)[B], Power Attack, Vital Strike, Weapon Focus (greatsword), Whirlwind Attack[B]
Skills Diplomacy +14, Fly +12, Intimidate +14, Knowledge (religion) +11, Perception +13, Sense Motive +9, Survival +9
Languages Celestial, Draconic, Infernal; truespeech
SQ second skin

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Flames of Faith (Ex) A legion archon can manifest a +1 flaming burst greatsword or +1 flaming javelin as a move-equivalent action. The legion archon's sword vanishes if it leaves its hand, and its javelin vanishes after striking or missing its target.

Second Skin (Ex) A legion archon is proficient in all forms of armor. It takes no reduction to its speed or any armor check penalties from wearing any sort of armor. These legion archons wear full plate armor.

The legion archons are not sophisticated creatures of good. They have been given the order "defend this dock against all intruders" by Ara Mathra himself. They will die to carry out that order.

The dock is a single massive block of white stone carved with figures in robes blind-folded and holding candles processing towards a Mitran sunburst (this is a hint on how to get through the labyrinth).

G-2 Hall of the Huntress

This great wooden feast hall is a place where there should be a raucous celebration. There is a large fire pit in the center of the chamber and great tables and benches arranged all around. But now it sits empty and cold, its occupants all gone to war or dead defending the Vale at Saintsbridge. There is only one who remains and she hides in shadow waiting for her chance to pounce.

Lea the Huntress has hunted game on a dozen different worlds. She came to this world on an errand for the mighty King Over the Mountain, master of the leonal decades ago. That errand long complete, she has decided to stay here a while. When she first met the great Ara Mathra, she became enamored with the powerful celestial. Unfortunately, Ara already had a consort (the chalkydri angel – see Act V below) and so instead, Lea pledged her service to him. He charged her to guard the entrance to the Gardens and that has become her obsession.

Why Weren't They at the Battle of Saintsbridge?

You may be wondering why all these good celestials did not march to Saintsbridge and help in the battle there. Perhaps they could have turned the tide of that disastrous conflict! First, some of them were sent. The shield archons and the celestial griffons were sent to the battle to reinforce the army. But why keep some in reserve?

The answer varies. Some of these creatures are visitors here (the ghaele and the kirin). Some of these creatures are guardians tasked to defend a certain location (the peri, Lea, Sirius, the movanic devas and the ghost martyrs). And then there are tiny number who are here because Ara Mathra has held them in reserve.

Ara Mathra is unsure how the course of the battle will go but he does not wish to leave the Cathedral undefended. He knows what great and terrible secrets it contains. He will do anything to keep those secrets safe. If Sanctum must be sacrificed he regrets it greatly, but difficult decisions must be made in times of war.

Lea the Huntress, Guardian of the Sacred Gardens **CR 12**

XP 19,200

NG Medium outsider (agathion, extraplanar, good)

Init +7; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision, scent; Perception +19

Aura protective aura (20 ft.)

DEFENSE

AC 27, touch 14, flat-footed 23 (+3 Dex, +1 dodge, +13 natural) (+4 deflection vs. evil)

hp 147 (14d10+70)

Fort +14, **Ref** +12, **Will** +6; +4 vs. poison, +4 resistance vs. evil

DR 10/evil and silver; **Immune** electricity, petrification; **Resist** cold 10, sonic 10; **SR** 23

OFFENSE

Speed 60 ft.

Melee bite +23 (1d8+8 plus grab), 2 claws +23 (1d6+8)

Special Attacks roar, pounce, rake (2 claws +23, 1d6+8)

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 14th; concentration +16)

Constant--*speak with animals*

At will--*detect thoughts*, *fireball* (DC 15), *hold monster* (DC 16)

3/day--*cure critical wounds*, *neutralize poison*, *remove disease*, *wall of force*

1/day--*heal*

TACTICS

During Combat Her preferred mode of combat is hiding until she announces her presence with a mighty roar hopefully catching all her enemies within the great cone. Shen then uses *wall of force* to isolate her foes so she can fight them one at a time. She leaps into combat using her fearsome pounce to grab and maul her enemies. Once that victory is won, she uses *heal* or *cure critical wounds* and repeats the procedure until all that invade the Hall of the Huntress are laid low.

Lea is not interested in taking prisoners. All who invade her Hall are worthy only death for their crime.

Morale Lea knows that if she dies she will both be banished from this plane and have proven herself an unworthy guardian. Fanatical about seeing that neither occurs, she fights to the death to defend her charge.

STATISTICS

Str 27, **Dex** 17, **Con** 20, **Int** 14, **Wis** 14, **Cha** 15

Base Atk +14; **CMB** +22 (+26 grapple); **CMD** 36

Feats Ability Focus (roar), Dodge, Improved Initiative, Mobility, Spring Attack, Weapon Focus (bite, claw)

Skills Acrobatics +24 (+36 jump), Handle Animal +19, Intimidate +19, Knowledge (any one) +19, Perception +19, Sense Motive +19, Spellcraft +16, Stealth +24; **Racial Modifiers** +4 Acrobatics, +4 Stealth

Languages Celestial, Draconic, Infernal; speak with animals, truespeech

SQ lay on hands (7d6, 9/day, as a 14th level paladin)

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Protective Aura (Su) Against attacks made or effects created by evil creatures, this ability provides a +4 deflection bonus to AC and a +4 resistance bonus on saving throws to anyone within 20 feet of the leonal. Otherwise, it functions as a *magic circle against evil* effect and a *lesser globe of invulnerability*, both with a radius of 20 feet (caster level equals leonal's HD). The defensive benefits from the circle are not included in a leonal's stat block.

Roar (Su) Up to three times per day, a leonal can emit a powerful roar as a standard action. Each roar affects a 60- foot cone with the effects of a *holy word* spell and also deals 2d6 points of sonic damage to all creatures in the area (DC 21 Fortitude negates). This is a sonic effect. The save DC is Charisma-based.

The Labyrinth

Beyond the Hall of the Huntress is the labyrinth of the Gardens of Serenity. The labyrinth is a magical barrier that limits entry into the Cathedral of Mitra Made Manifest. In truth, the Cathedral is not entirely on our plane of existence. It stands on the very edge of a demi-plane. The only way to access it is through the labyrinth. If you try to climb around or fly towards it, it always seems to be in the distance. The farther you fly the farther it is away. Created by the divine will of the god Mitra, there is no way for mortals to overcome this. You must pass through the labyrinth to overcome this barrier. There is simply no other way without wielding the power of a god.

The labyrinth is an open air structure made of crudely cut field stones overgrown with moss, vines and flowers of a thousand sorts. Entering the labyrinth, you know that you have entered a mystical place. There is something unnatural – something about it that never seems quite real. In fact, it is very real and even deadly. The sense of surreality is simply a byproduct of passing through the barrier between worlds and entering the Cathedral which lies beyond the center of the Labyrinth (G-4 below).

Motes of light hover about the Labyrinth. These small luminous wisps are neither wholly alive nor seperate from the labyrinth. They are the caretakers and they keep the labyrinth connected to the prime material and in fine working order. They also ask the three riddles. These riddles offer both a challenge and contain the solution to the labyrinth.

The first mote approaches after a few moments of flittering and asks the first riddle.

Riddle #1: *Say its name and this thing dies...*
Answer: Silence

With the answering of the first riddle, the PCs traverse deeper into the labyrinth. They enter into the hunting grounds of Sirius the Hound and his brood of eight blink dogs. The hound knows that evil is afoot in the vale and has been warned by Ara Mathra to expect intruders. Therefore he attacks first and asks questions later.

After Sirius the Hound is defeated and they have wandered the labyrinth for an hour, another wisp approaches and whispers a second riddle.

Riddle #2: *One to whom the mirror never lies...*
Answer: the blind or a blind man

Answering the second riddle allows the PCs access to G-3 The Fields of Paradise (see below) where the elusive kirin feed upon the green grass of this wondrous place.

After the fields and another hour of wandering the labyrinth, a third wisp arrives.

Riddle #3: *A wick'ed thing from which darkness flies...*
Answer: A candle

If answered correctly the wisp immediately speaks: *"the three at once where the answer lies"* and disappears.

This then is the solution to the labyrinth. Be silent. Close your eyes (or wear a blindfold – you must not be able to see). Have a candle in your hand. Do all three and take a hundred steps. After those hundred steps, you will arrive a the center of the labyrinth (see G-4 below) and the way out. Of course the people there will probably not be happy to see you but that is another matter.

What is not a solution is randomly walking the maze. The labyrinth ever shifts and change. Randomly walking the maze simply ensures you get very very lost. For every hour you walk randomly it takes two hours to back track and get out. If done persistently and without proper provision this could be dangerous, but that is unlikely.

If the wisps are ever attacked or threatened they simply dissipate. They will not return for another 1d3 hours but after that they behave as normal.

If the PCs get stuck, there are alternative ways to solving the riddles. Master Lotte, Sanctum's reeve, knows much of these riddles and can provide a hint or two.

Blink Dog of the Labyrinth, Get of Sirius (8) CR 4

XP 1,200 each (9,600 XP total)
LG Medium advanced magical beast
Init +3; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision, scent; Perception +9

DEFENSE

AC 15, touch 13, flat-footed 12 (+3 Dex, +2 natural)
hp 37 (5d10+10)
Fort +5, **Ref** +6, **Will** +4

OFFENSE

Speed 40 ft.
Melee bite +6 (1d6+1)

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 9th; concentration +9)
Constant—*blink*
At will—quickened *dimension door* (self only)

TACTICS

During Combat They blink and bite, doing all they can to defeat invaders in the labyrinth and supporting their sire and idol -- the hound Sirius.
Morale If Sirius is slain, they try to avenge his death and mob whoever brought down their sire. If Sirius is slain and half the pack is destroyed, the survivors *dimension door* away.

STATISTICS

Str 12, **Dex** 16, **Con** 14, **Int** 12, **Wis** 13, **Cha** 11
Base Atk +5; **CMB** +6; **CMD** 19 (23 vs. trip)
Feats Combat Reflexes, Iron Will
Skills Perception +9, Stealth +10, Survival +9 (+13 scent tracking)
Languages Celestial, Sylvan

He doesn't know the specific answers to the riddles because they always change, but he does know the three riddles reveal what needs to be done to bypass the labyrinth. He will tell everything he knows if threatened.

Story Award: Award the PCs a CR 11 (12,800 XP) reward for solving the riddle of the labyrinth.

Sirius the Hound, Hunter of the Labyrinth CR 11

XP 12,800
Male advanced 8th level Sorcerer (celestial) blink dog
LG Large magical beast
Init +8; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision, scent; Perception +13

DEFENSE

AC 24, touch 14, flat-footed 20 (+4 armor, +4 Dex, +6 natural, +1 dodge, -1 size)
hp 81 (5d10+8d6+26)
Fort +7, **Ref** +9, **Will** +11
Resist Acid 5, Cold 5

OFFENSE

Speed 40 ft.
Melee bite +11 (1d8+2)
Special Attack *heavenly fire* +13 ranged touch (1d4+4 against evil targets)

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 9th; concentration +13)
Constant—*blink*
At will—quickened *dimension door* (self only)

Sorcerer Spells Known (CL 8th; concentration +12)
4th (4/day) – *shout* (DC 19)
3rd (6/day) – *hold person* (DC 18), *lightning bolt* (DC 18), *magic circler against evil*
2nd (7/day) – *bull's strength, flaming sphere* (DC 17), *hideous laughter* (DC 17), *resist energy*
1st (7/day) – *bless, charm person* (DC 16), *grease* (DC 16), *mage armor, magic missile, sleep* (DC 16)
0 – arcane mark, detect magic, detect poison, ghost sound, light, mage hand, prestidigitation, ray of frost
Bloodline Celestial

TACTICS

Before Combat Sirius always keeps *mage armor* cast upon himself.
During Combat Anyone Sirius encounters in the labyrinth who he does not recognize, he first tries to charm and if that fails, he tries to slay using his lethal bark (*shout*).
Morale Sirius has been charged with keeping the labyrinth safe by Ara Mathra himself, and he will die before failing in that duty.

STATISTICS

Str 14, **Dex** 18, **Con** 14, **Int** 14, **Wis** 14, **Cha** 18
Base Atk +9; **CMB** +11; **CMD** 25 (29 vs. trip)
Feats Combat Casting, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Eschew Materials, Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Spell Focus (enchantment), Spell Focus (evocation)
Skills Intimidate +15, Knowledge (arcana) +13, Perception +13, Spellcraft +13, Stealth +14, Survival +9 (+13 scent tracking)
Languages Celestial, Common, Sylvan

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Heavenly Fire (Sp): Sirius can unleash a ray of heavenly fire as a standard action, targeting any foe within 30 feet as a ranged touch attack. Against evil creatures, this ray deals 1d4 points of damage + 4. This damage is divine and not subject to energy resistance or immunity. This ray heals good creatures of 1d4 points of damage + 4. A good creature cannot benefit from your heavenly fire more than once per day. Neutral creatures are neither harmed nor healed by this effect. Sirius can use this ability 7 times per day.

G-3 The Fields of Paradise

Hidden within the labyrinth is an almost radiantly green patch of grass. Here it is not winter. Here is perpetually spring, warmed by the radiant light of the Shining Lord. A herd of four kirin feast upon the green grass of this sacred garden, drawn by this oasis of serenity. The kirin have come from an impossibly distant land to consult with the wisdom of great Ara Mathra in the Cathedral of Mitra Made Manifest. The angel has been busy as of late with other concerns and they have not yet been granted audience.

These wise beasts are certain something is amiss in the Vale. They can sense it. The harmony of this place is diminished. They have heard the distant clamor of battle and felt the presence of death. They were not called to defend the Vale nor are they creatures of war. Still, they would help if they could.

Skittish and famously elusive, the kirin have considered fleeing this place. But they remain because of their desire to meet with Ara Mathra. Still, they are easy to spook.

Being able to detect evil, any who approach them with such an aura is talked to forcefully and even threatened. "Why do you defile these sacred fields?" they demand. "Does the great Ara Mathra know of your intrusion?" If such brazen evil ones attack, they fight back for a time but are quick to flee if the enemy proves resistant to their breath weapons or able to hurt them.

On the other hand if the PCs mask their aura and approach as friends, the kirin will listen to them. They will want to know what has happened. The kirin are not fools (they have a +14 sense motive) but if successfully bluffed, they can be lured into a place where they cannot simply fly away. For example, the Hall of the Huntress (G-2). And there they can be properly massacred.

And why would the PCs want to do that? If mere blood thirst is not enough for our villains, there is a monetary reason for slaying these noble and majestic creatures.

The kirin have no obvious treasure and yet they are very valuable. Kirin pelts, kirin horns and kirin blood are very rare and potent magical components. Anyone making a successful DC 20 Knowledge (arcana) test knows this. If these kirin can be slaughtered, bled and skinned, great magical power can be harvested. These strange beasts of the air are in fact walking treasure troves.

Every kirin yields 5,000 gold pieces in magical components. Half that value is in the shimmering iridescent pelt. This value may be converted into any magical item made of leather (cloaks, belts, robes and the like) assuming the PCs have the necessary feats. The horns (1,500 gp each) make magnificent wands, rods and stave tips as well as magical daggers. The blood (1,000 gp) is a phenomenal potion and alchemical item base.

If any of these components are used for their appropriate item type, they speed up magical creation. Instead of 1,000 gp of magic item being created, these allow for magical creation at the rate of 1,500 gp a day. A great treasure trove feasts in the field of paradise if the PCs have only wits enough to catch it.

Kirin of the Heavenly Herd (4) **CR 7**

XP 3,200 each (12,800 XP total)

LG Large magical beast (air)

Init +6; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., detect evil, low-light vision, scent; Perception +17

DEFENSE

AC 20, touch 15, flat-footed 14 (+6 Dex, +5 natural, -1 size)
hp 85 (9d10+36)
Fort +10, **Ref** +12, **Will** +10
Resist cold 10, electricity 30, fire 10; **SR** 18

OFFENSE

Speed 60 ft., fly 120 ft. (good)
Melee gore +14 (1d8+5), 2 hooves +8 (1d6+2)
Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 5 ft.
Special Attacks breath weapon (15-ft. cone, 5d6 fire damage, Reflex DC 18 for half, usable every 1d4 rounds), powerful charge (gore, 2d8+14)

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 9th; concentration +15)
Constant—*detect evil, water walk*
At will—*gaseous form, gust of wind*
1/day—*break enchantment, create food and water, major creation, wind walk (self only)*

Spells Known (CL 6th; concentration +12)
3rd (4/day)—*lightning bolt* (DC 19)
2nd (7/day)—*lesser restoration*, *scorching ray*
1st (8/day)—*color spray* (DC 17), *cure light wounds*, *disguise self*, *remove fear*, *sanctuary* (DC 17)
0 (at will)—*arcane mark*, *create water*, *detect magic*, *guidance*, *mage hand*, *mending*, stabilize

TACTICS

During Combat They coordinate their breath weapons to create a torrent of cleansing flame. After that, they use their powerful charge to engage the evil doers who threaten these sacred fields. Lightning bolts and healing cast on fellow herd members are also frequently used.
Morale Skittish and needed back in their own lands, the kirin flee if reduced to 42 hit points or less or if one of their number is slain.

STATISTICS

Str 20, **Dex** 23, **Con** 18, **Int** 18, **Wis** 21, **Cha** 23
Base Atk +9; CMB +15; CMD 31 (35 vs. trip)
Feats Combat Casting, Eschew MaterialsB, Flyby Attack, Hover, Iron Will, Weapon Focus (gore)
Skills Diplomacy +15, Fly +20, Knowledge (history) +13, Perception +17, Perform (sing) +15, Sense Motive +14
Languages Abyssal, Auran, Celestial, Common, Draconic; telepathy 100 ft.

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Spells A kirin casts spells as a 6th-level sorcerer, and can cast spells from the cleric list as well as those normally available to a sorcerer. Cleric spells are considered arcane spells for a kirin, meaning that the creature does not need a divine focus to cast them.

G-4 The Center of the Labyrinth

At last our villains have found the center of the Labyrinth. Two of the greatest heroes in the Vale await here. The Master of Serenity came to Valtaerna from a distant land years ago seeking Ara Mathra, who he had seen in a dream. It was the angel who calmed his raging spirit and opened the path to peace. He has long ago given up his name and pledged his life in service to the angel. Today he answers this pledge.

The Master of Serenity is a powerfully built physically perfect speciment of humanity. He wears nothing but a loose robe, sash and undergarments. He moves with inhuman grace and poise. He does not smile and only rarely speaks. He wanted to lead his forces in the battle of Saintsbridge but Ara Mathra told him no. "Someone must remain behind to guard the flame." And so he did. His greatest pupil Brother Nicodemus led them instead. He has transcended anger and the need for revenge. But the PCs will pay for what they did to Nicodemus.

The Master of Serenity, head of the Serene Order CR 13

XP 25,600
Male human monk 14
LG Medium humanoid
Init +8; **Senses** Perception +19

DEFENSE

AC 23, touch 20, flat-footed 18 (+4 Dex, +1 dodge, +3 monk, +2 Wis, +3 natural)
hp 147 (14d8+84)
Fort +13, **Ref** +13, **Will** +11; +2 vs. enchantment
Defensive Abilities improved evasion; Immune disease, poison; **SR** 24

OFFENSE

Speed 70 ft.
Melee unarmed strike +15/+10 (2d6+2/19-20) or unarmed strike flurry of blows +17/+17/+12/+12/+7 (2d6+2/19-20)
Ranged sling +14 (1d4+2)
Special Attacks flurry of blows, stunning fist (14/day, fatigued, sickened, staggered)

TACTICS

During Combat The Master's primary purpose is to defend the Oracle of Mitra and to avenge this violation of the sacred Vale. He uses his mobility to attack spellcasters (with high jump he likely can attack even flying spellcasters) first.
Morale As the head of the Serene Order he has dedicated his life to the service of Mitra and the defense of the Vale.

STATISTICS

Str 14, **Dex** 18, **Con** 18, **Int** 8, **Wis** 14, **Cha** 10
Base Atk +10/+5; **CMB** +14 (+16 to disarm, grapple, trip); **CMD** 36 (38 vs. disarm, grapple, trip)
Feats Agile Maneuvers, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Improved Critical (unarmed strike), Improved Disarm, Improved Grapple, Improved Initiative, Improved Trip, Improved Unarmed Strike, Mobility, Spring Attack, Stunning Fist, Toughness, Weapon Finesse, Weapon Focus (unarmed strike)
Skills Acrobatics +21 (+35 jump), Climb +19, Intimidate +17, Perception +19
Languages Common
SQ abundant step, fast movement, high jump, ki pool (9 points, lawful, magic) maneuver training, slow fall 70 ft., wholeness body
Combat Gear bullets (10)
Other Gear sling, *amulet of natural armor +3*

Sambethe, the Oracle of Mitra CR 14

XP 38,400
Female aasimar oracle 14
NG Medium outsider (native)
Init +1; **Senses** darkvision 60ft.; Perception +3

DEFENSE

AC 22, touch 11, flat-footed 21 (+9 armor, +1 Dex, +2 shield)
hp 119 (14d8+56)
Fort +6, **Ref** +5, **Will** +10
Immune fatigue; **Resist** acid 5, cold 5, electricity 5

OFFENSE

Speed 20 ft.
Melee longsword +14/+9 (1d8+3/19-20)
Special Attacks channel positive energy 5/day (DC 21, 7d6)

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 14th; concentration +18)
1/day—*daylight*

Oracle Spells Known (CL 14th; concentration +18)
7th (3/day)—*greater restoration, holy word* (DC 21), *mass cure serious wounds*
6th (5/day)—*blade barrier* (DC 20), *greater dispel magic, heal, mass cure moderate wounds*
5th (6/day)—*breath of life, cleanse, flame strike* (DC 19), *mass cure light wounds, righteous might*
4th (7/day)—*cure critical wounds, divine power, freedom of movement, holy smite* (DC 18), *restoration, tongues*
3rd (7/day)—*cure serious wounds, dispel magic, magic circle against evil, neutralize poison, remove curse, remove disease*
2nd (7/day)—*consecrate, cure moderate wounds, lesser restoration, remove paralysis, silence* (DC 16), *spear of purity* (DC 16), *status*
1st (7/day)—*bless, comprehend languages, cure light wounds, detect evil, detect undead, protection from evil, sanctuary* (DC 15)
0 (at will)—*create water, detect magic, detect poison, guidance, light, mending, purify food and drink, read magic, stabilize*
Mystery Life

TACTICS

Before Combat The oracle can sense the villains approaching and casts *sanctuary* and *magic circle against evil* on herself.

During Combat Sambethe does all she can to support the Master and to keep him combatant. She heals his wounds, dispels magical effects that afflict him and restores his strength. If there is ever a round where he needs no healing then she uses *flame strike* to damage his enemies.

If however finally the Master falls, she casts *righteous might* upon herself and joins the fight personally. She uses her healing spells upon herself to keep her in the battle. She uses holy word to gain advantage against her foes and she presses the attack. She uses her every spell with wanton abandon. The time for half measures is over.

Morale The Oracle of Mitra fights to the death to defend the sacred flame.

STATISTICS

Str 16, **Dex** 12, **Con** 14, **Int** 14, **Wis** 12, **Cha** 18
Base Atk +10/+5; **CMB** +13; **CMD** 24
Feats Armor Proficiency (heavy), Combat Casting, Greater Spell Penetration, Martial Weapon Proficiency (longsword), Spell Penetration, Toughness, Weapon Focus (longsword)
Skills Diplomacy +23, Heal +18, Knowledge (planes) +19, Knowledge (religion) +19, Sense Motive +18, Spellcraft +19; **Racial Modifiers** +2 Diplomacy, +2 Perception
Languages Celestial, Common, Dwarven, Elven
SQ oracle's curse (lame), revelations (channel, enhanced cures, safe curing, spirit boost)
Gear full plate, healer's kit, heavy wooden shield, holy symbol, longsword

The Master of Serenity is not alone. Beside him stands an impossibly beautiful young woman who is only marred by being lame in one leg. She is clad in armor and ready for battle, looking almost like an angel herself.

The Oracle of Mitra, Sambethe, is a legend in Talingarde. She is more frequently visited by the spirit of blessed Mitra and has been his chosen vessel more than anyone else on this island. Cursed with lameness, still she does not let it distract her from her divine duty.

Together they guard the second eternal flame – The Flame Beneficent. This large fire does not burn intensely or angrily. Indeed it gives off virtually no heat although it sheds light brightly.

Also like the Guardian Flame, if anyone with the party has light sensitivity or takes damage from daylight (for example if one of the PCs is a vampire) then this light causes them some discomfort. They are effectively dazzled (-1 to attack rolls and sight-based perception checks) while the fire yet burns.

This fire also can only be extinguished by unholy water or *desecrate* however it lacks the wrath of Mitra. Instead the Flame Beneficent is a fire of healing. Any one who will places their hand in the flame and acknowledges Mitra as their lord will be fully healed. Further all ability score damage, curses, negative levels, charms or negative conditions will be immediately removed. A follower may only use this flame once per year and neither the Master nor the Oracle has used it. This is why they fight here.

If the Flame Beneficent is extinguished there is an immediate reaction. The ground trembles slightly. The sky darkens and then turns dark red almost as blood. Somewhere in the Cathedral of Mitra, the great stained glass window in the Holiest of Holies shatters. The red light of a hateful sky streams in upon Ara Mathra. The angel understands the message all too well. The servants of Asmodeus are upon his doorstep. He prepares for them.

Story Award: Extinguishing the Beneficent Flame earns a CR 12 (19,200 XP) reward.

G-5 The Stairway of a Thousand Steps

A winding set of narrow stairs leads up the side of the mountain to the grand façade of the Cathedral of Mitra Made Manifest. This is the legendary thousand steps that each prospective cleric of Mitra in the Order of Saint Macarius must make. It leads to the entrance to the Cathedral where their final judgment awaits. For our villains it is the way to their final conquest of the Vale of Valtaerna.

G-6 The Cathedral Entrance

This is the grand facade of the Cathedral of Mitra Made Manifest. It is a baroque wonder of the world. This entrance way was not carved by mortal hands, instead crafted by tasked archons who have adorned it with the iconography of a thousand martyrs and saints. These life-like figures all bow in obiesance before the great and glorious undying light of Mitra.

The entrance way is guarded by three invisible swords of holy fire (actually movanic devas). The Cathedral has currently been sealed given the current calamity and so these swords attack anyone who approaches. Someone who does not detect evil the swords will warn in truespeech. Evil beings they attack without delay.

Three Swords of Flame (Movanic Devas) CR 10

XP 9,600 each (28,800 XP total)

NG Medium outsider (angel, extraplanar, good)

Init +7; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., *detect evil*, low-light vision; Perception +20

Aura protective aura

DEFENSE

AC 24, touch 13, flat-footed 21 (+3 Dex, +11 natural) (+4 deflection vs. evil)

hp 126 (12d10+60)

Fort +12, **Ref** +11, **Will** +9; +4 vs. poison, +4 resistance vs. evil

Defensive Abilities nature's pacifism, protected life force; **DR** 10/evil; **Immune** acid, cold, electricity, fire, death effects, energy drain, petrification; **SR** 21

OFFENSE

Speed 40 ft., fly 60 ft. (good)

Melee +1 flaming greatsword +17/+12/+7 (2d6+7/19-20 plus 1d6 fire)

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 8th; concentration +12)

Constant—*detect evil*

At will—*aid*, *discern lies* (DC 18), *dispel evil* (DC 19), *dispel magic*, *holy smite* (DC 18), *invisibility* (self only), *plane shift* (DC 19), *remove curse*, *remove disease*, *remove fear*

7/day—*cure serious wounds*

1/day—*antimagic field*, *awaken*, *holy aura* (DC 22)

TACTICS

During Combat They start any fight by activating their *antimagic field*. They employ *holy smite* and their flaming greatswords to inflict divine fiery death on evil-doers who dare attack their Cathedral.

Morale The movanic devas fight to the death to defend the Cathedral.

STATISTICS

Str 19, **Dex** 17, **Con** 18, **Int** 17, **Wis** 17, **Cha** 19

Base Atk +12; **CMB** +16; **CMD** 29

Feats Cleave, Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Power Attack, Toughness, Vital Strike

Skills Diplomacy +19, Fly +22, Intimidate +19, Knowledge (planes) +18, Knowledge (religion) +18, Perception +20, Sense Motive +16, Stealth +18, Survival +18; **Racial Modifiers** +4 Perception

Languages Celestial, Draconic, Infernal; truespeech

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Nature's Pacifism (Ex) Animals and plant creatures do not willingly attack a movanic deva, though they can be forced to do so by magic. If the deva attacks a plant or animal, its protection against that creature ends.

Protected Life Force (Ex) Movanic devas are never harmed by positive-dominant or negative-dominant planar traits.

Act Five: The Cathedral of Mitra Made Manifest

This act details the final bastion within the Vale of Valtaerna -- the fabled Cathedral of Mitra Made Manifest.

Event One: The Pact

Ara Mathra has not been idle. From within the Holiest of Holies (2-9 see below) he has sent out his mind and contacted the storm giant Anteus who dwells within a great cloud castle far to the north. It was old Anteus that the angel saved from death at the hands of a vile devil-corrupted sky dragon. Anteus made a pact that in Ara Mathra's darkest hour he would come to his aid. Today he fulfills that pact.

This event can occur any time after the Battle of Saintsbridge. It is a fine way to break up the constant battles against good celestials and divine agents. Anteus the Storm Giant flies into the Vale with a blast of lightning and a thunderous laugh. He rides on the back of one roc and another flies at his side. He leads a flock of fifty savage hippogriffs. He sends that flock towards Sanctum to assault the army encamped there.

He does not join that assault. He seeks out the PCs intent to slay them. Ara Mathra has told him that the bugbear horde was led by a group of powerful villains. Destroy them and the bugbears, leaderless, will be easy to destroy. But while these villains haunt the Vale, he dare not leave his redoubt for fear that all will be lost.

Anteus attacks with a hearty laugh, acting almost as if this were a game. *"How could anyone so tiny manage such vast acts of evil? No matter, after you've had a taste of my lightning, you'll rue the day you turned to such deviltry."*

With that combat begins. Anteus and his trained rocs fight together to defeat the villains. When they are defeated, the sky begins to darken and turns blood red. If there are any clerics, oracles or anti-paladins in the service of Asmodeus they hear a whisper in their ear in infernal: *"Give him to me."*

If a villain will sacrifice the defeated giant, long an enemy of the infernal on this plane, to Asmodeus the prince of hell will reward them. The surviving hippogriffs (twenty four of them) stop their assault upon Sanctum and begin to circle above the PCs screaming madly. Before their eyes the hippogriffs change and warp. They gain the fiendish template and now answer to our PCs.

Hippogriffs (50) CR 2

XP 600 each

hp 22 each (see the Hippogriff entry in Bestiary 2)

Anteus the Storm Giant CR 13

XP 25,600

CG Huge humanoid (giant)

Init +2; **Senses** low-light vision; Perception +27

DEFENSE

AC 28, touch 10, flat-footed 26 (+6 armor, +2 Dex, +12 natural, –2 size)

hp 199 (19d8+114)

Fort +17, **Ref** +8, **Will** +13

Defensive Abilities rock catching; **Immune** electricity

OFFENSE

Speed 50 ft., swim 40 ft. (35 ft., swim 30 ft. in armor)

Melee mwk greatsword +27/+22/+17 (4d6+21/17–20) or 2 slams +26 (2d6+14)

Ranged mwk composite longbow +15/+10/+5 (3d6+14/×3)

Space 15 ft.; **Reach** 15 ft.

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 15th)

Constant—*freedom of movement*

2/day—*control weather*, *levitate*

1/day—*call lightning* (DC 15), *chain lightning* (DC 18)

TACTICS

During Combat As much as loves bathing his opponents in lightning, he also greatly enjoys power attacking with his greatsword. He does both ... a lot.

Morale He owes Ara Mathra a life and by the gods, Anteus will either liberate this Vale or die trying.

STATISTICS

Str 39, **Dex** 14, **Con** 23, **Int** 16, **Wis** 20, **Cha** 15

Base Atk +14; **CMB** +30; **CMD** 42

Feats Awesome Blow, Cleave, Combat Reflexes, Improved Bull Rush, Improved Critical (greatsword), Improved Sunder, Improved Vital Strike, Iron Will, Power Attack, Vital Strike

Skills Acrobatics +18, Climb +17, Craft (any one) +13, Intimidate +20, Perception +27, Perform (sing) +12, Sense Motive +24, Swim +22

Languages Auran, Common, Draconic, Giant

SQ militant, water breathing

Gear huge masterwork greatsword, huge masterwork longbow, huge helm of mithral and sky-opal worth 7500 gp

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Militant (Ex) Storm giants are proficient with all simple and all martial weapons.

Water Breathing (Ex) Storm giants breathe water as well as air.

Rocs (2) CR 9

XP 6,400 each (12,800 XP total)

N Gargantuan animal

Init +6; **Senses** low-light vision; Perception +15

DEFENSE

AC 22, touch 8, flat-footed 20 (+2 Dex, +14 natural, –4 size)

hp 120 (16d8+48)

Fort +13, **Ref** +14, **Will** +8

OFFENSE

Speed 20 ft., fly 80 ft. (average)

Melee 2 talons +18 (2d6+9/19–20 plus grab), bite +17 (2d8+9)

Space 20 ft.; **Reach** 15 ft.

TACTICS

During Combat The rocs power attack with their talons and try to grab opponents. They then fly upwards, pausing only to bite their prey. Once they have reached a 160 feet up, they drop their prey. They then charge downward and pick a new victim.

Morale These beasts flee if their master, Anteus, is slain.

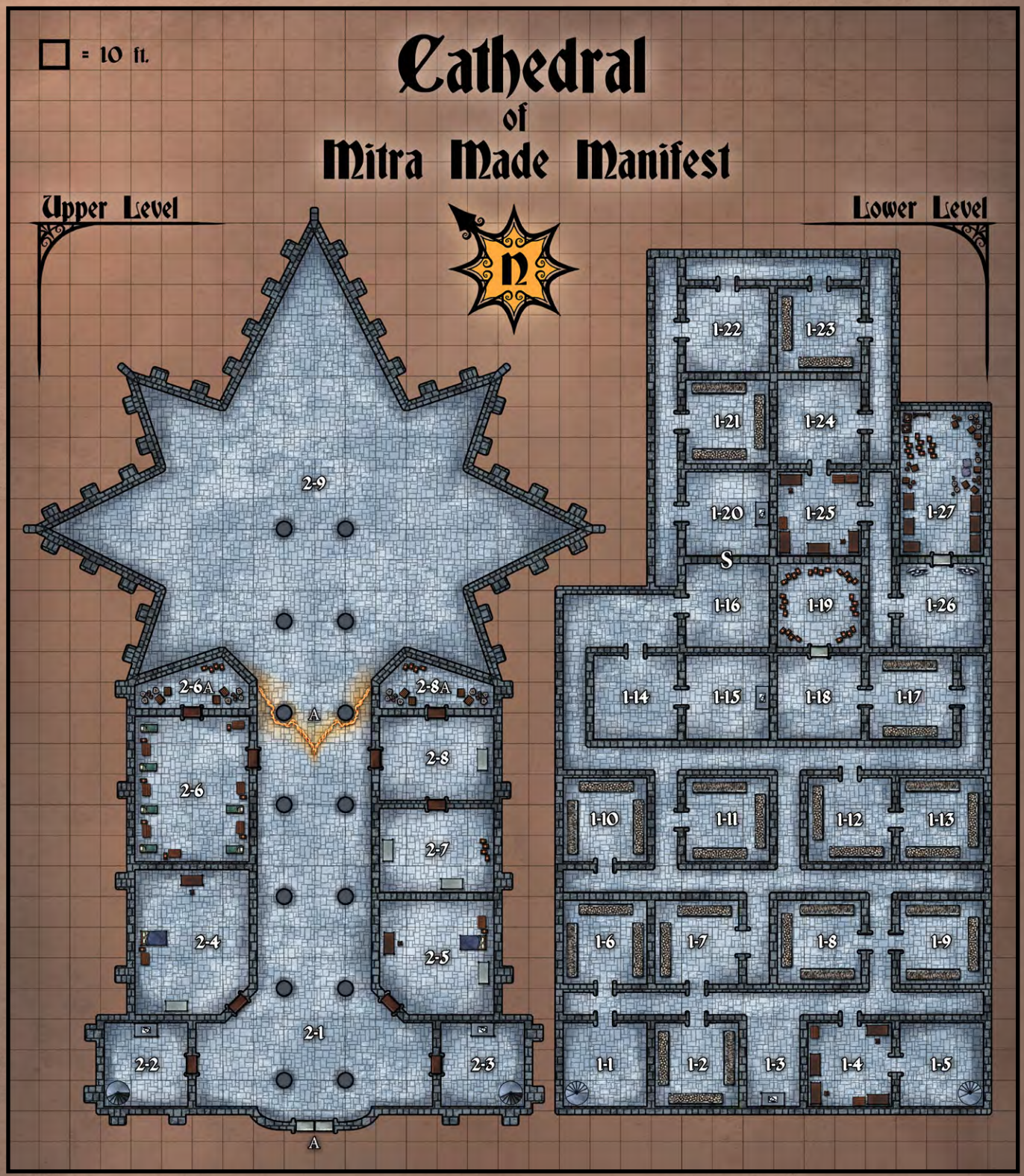
STATISTICS

Str 28, **Dex** 15, **Con** 17, **Int** 2, **Wis** 12, **Cha** 11

Base Atk +12; **CMB** +25 (+29 grapple); **CMD** 37

Feats Flyby Attack, Improved Critical (talons), Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Lightning Reflexes, Power Attack, Skill Focus (Perception), Weapon Focus (talons)

Skills Fly +7, Perception +15


= 10 ft.
Cathedral
of
Mitra Made Manifest
Upper Level
Lower Level
N
2-9
2-6A
2-8A
A
2-8
2-6
2-7
2-4
2-5
2-1
2-2
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A
1-22
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S
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1-5

The Cathedral

Lower Level

1-1 Western Stairwell

This empty room is little more than a landing for a spiral stairway from the upper level (room 2-2). It is adorned with murals showing the procession of priests carrying the blessed dead to be interned in the ossuaries below. From here, though their bodies lie, their spirits join with Mitra in the undying lands.

There is an inscription in celestial hidden amongst the engravings. It takes a DC 20 Perception check to notice it. It reads: *"In our darkest hour, the martyrs shall answer the tears of the blessed."*

1-2 First Ossuary of the Blessed

Above the entry way to this chamber is a large roman numeral I. These are the oldest bones in the ossuaries. They show evidence of their great age, being so fragile as to be paper thin. Still disturbing any of these delicate remains immediately garners the attentions of the ghost martyrs who roam this lower level (see room 1-8 below for details).

Inside this ossuary there is a faint sound. It is difficult to exactly discern. A DC 20 Perception check allows the PCs to hear the sound of chanting in celestial. The phrase that echoes over and over again, so faint as to be barely perceptible, is the same as in the inscription in room 1-1. *"In our darkest hour, the martyrs shall answer the tears of the blessed."* This is the prayer of Earnan MacCathlain (1-25) and it reverberates through every ossuary.

1-3 Shrine of Saint Macarius the Martyr

This is a shrine commemorating all those who have sacrificed themselves for the ideals of Saint Macarius and the life of the order's founder and first martyr – Saint Macarius himself.

The shrine is has a small marble statue of Saint Macarius – dressed in a traveller's robe and with a plain wooden holy symbol. He is clearly a militant cleric – he carries a mace and the statue gives evidence of chainmail under his robes. In fact, what he truly looks like is an archetypical adventuring cleric.

Every inch of the the shrine is adorned by bas reliefs showing the deeds of Saint Macarius and how he discovered the Vale of Valtaerna and became the first priest to solve the riddle of the sacred flames.

The western wall depicts this: *Macarius came to the Vale drawn here by the whispered words of an angel of Mitra. He found the Vale uninhabited by men but illuminated by a strange light atop a mountain. He climbed the Mountain of the Phoenix and faced the great fiery beast itself without fear. He pledged that he and his followers would forever guard this sacred vale. Thus did he appease the Guardian Flame.*

The eastern wall depicts this: *Macarius found the way through the labyrinth and placed his hand in the Beneficent Flame and was restored (before this evidently Saint Macarius had suffered from some unnamed affliction – a thorn of the flesh is all it says). Macarius pledged that he would share his gift of healing with all in need. Thus did he appease the Beneficent Flame.*

The central wall depicts this: *Macarius found the Undying Flame in a cave beyond the labyrinth* (that cave has since been converted into a Cathedral). *There he communed with the angel Ara Mathra. The angel Ara Mathra asked him the true test and he answered it honestly and correctly. He pledged that his Order would bind its fate to the Flame Undying. And Ara Mathra became his teacher.*

Note: The Shrine does not reveal the true test. That is kept secret so each acolyte could face it themselves.

Saint Macarius established the order and lived a life full of great deeds (those great deeds are immortalized in the upper level of the cathedral in room 2-7). *He died a martyr and was interned here. He waits for his chance to again serve. Speak here to him for even now, he listens.*

1-4 Record Room

This chamber is stacked with old records and carefully catalouged books and scrolls. These are the records of the Order of Saint Macarius and they record the deeds both great and small of every full member of the Order. These records are a prizeless treasure of the Church and their loss would be devastating. This room has a faint magical aura and any item stored here will never rot nor molder.

There is a great open tome that lists all those who have been interred here over the years. There is a rule for being laid to rest here. In your lifetime, you must have cast at least three divine spells from Mitra. Every single bone in the ossuaries here beneath the Cathedral comes from a divine spellcaster of Mitra. Disturbing or damaging any book here earns the attention of the ghost martyrs (see room 1-8 for details) who prowl the lower level.

Story Award: Award the PCs a CR 11 (12,800 XP) reward for burning the records of the Order.

1-5 Eastern Stairwell

This empty room is little more than a landing for a spiral stairway from the upper level (room 2-3). It is adorned similarly to the Western Stairwell (1-1) and even has the same hidden inscription.

1-6 Second Ossuary of the Blessed

Above the entry way to this chamber is a large roman numeral II. This Ossuary also contains bones of great antiquity that date from the earliest days of the Order. Anyone who disturbs these bones earns the attention of the ghost martyrs (see Room 1-8 below).

1-7 Third Ossuary of the Blessed

Above the entry way to this chamber is a large roman numeral III. These bones reflect the fact that by the time of their internment the Order of Macarius was wealthier and more beloved. These bones are wrapped in white cloth and many of the martyrs were buried with a silver holy symbol. There are 52 silver holy symbols of Mitra scattered about this ossuary if the bones are carefully searched (each worth 25 gp; 1300 gp total). Of course this sort of flagrant desecration draws the ghost martyrs (see Room 1-8 below)

1-8 Fourth Ossuary of the Blessed

Above the entry way to this chamber is a large roman numeral IV. Inside this chamber are also interred more martyr bones. What sets this room apart is the three ghostly knights that hover in the chamber each wielding a great sword. If anyone who detects evil enters this chamber they attack immediately.

If an intruder does not possess an aura of evil, does not wear a holy symbol of Asmodeus (or any evil god) and is not seen desecrating a tomb, instead the ghosts call out, *"Thou art forbidden in these catacombs. Depart or face our wrath."*

These ghost martyrs are not geniuses and trickery will work against them. If anyone answers the ghost's call with "We seek Earnan MacCathlain" or something similar and wears a holy symbol of Mitra, then ghosts point deeper within the catacombs.

"He prays at the tomb of Macarius and calls forth the legions of martyrs. Disturb him not. His last disciples wait for him. Join them if ye will. Go but disturb not the sleep of the martyrs. They will awaken soon enough."

And then they return to their endless patrol of the ossuaries.

Ghost Martyr Paladins (3) **CR 8**

XP 4,800 each (14,400 XP total)
Human ghost paladin 7
LG Medium undead (incorporeal)
Init +7; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., Perception +12
Aura courage (10 ft.)

DEFENSE

AC 17, touch 17, flat-footed 14 (+3 Dex, +4 Deflection)
hp 73 (7d10+35)
Fort +9, **Ref** +9, **Will** +11
Defensive Abilities channel resistance +4, divine grace +4, incorporeal; **Immune** ability drain, death effects, disease, energy drain, exhaustion, fatigue, mind-affecting effects, paralysis, poison, sleep, stun

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft. fly (perfect)
Melee +1 *ghost touch greatsword* +11/+6 (2d6+4/19–20x2)
Special Attacks corrupting touch, smite evil (3/day, +4 attack and AC, +7 damage)

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 7th; concentration +11)
At Will—*detect evil*

Paladin Spells Prepared (CL 4th; concentration +8)
2nd—*eagle's splendor*
1st—*bless weapon*, *divine favor*

TACTICS

Before Combat If they sense intruders, the ghost paladins cast their spells to prepare for battle and then proceed to the source of the intrusion
During Combat These undead martyrs alternate using their smites and corrupting touch to destroy interlopers.
Morale These undead martyrs fight to the death.

STATISTICS

Str 14 (ghost touch items only), **Dex** 16, **Con** --, **Int** 10, **Wis** 10, **Cha** 19
Base Atk +7; **CMB** +9; **CMD** 22
Feats Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Power Attack, Toughness, Weapon Focus (Greatsword)
Skills Diplomacy +8, Handle Animal +8, Heal +4, Knowledge (nobility) +4, Knowledge (religion) +4, Perception +12, Ride +7, Sense Motive +7, Stealth +11; **Racial Modifiers** +8 Perception and Stealth
Languages Common
SQ aura of good, channel positive energy (DC 15, 4d6), divine bond (weapon +1), incorporeal, lay on hands (3d6, 5/day), mercies (fatigued, dazed), undead traits

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Smite Evil (Su) Once per day, a paladin can call out to the powers of good to aid her in her struggle against evil. As a swift action, the paladin chooses one target within sight to smite. If this target is evil, the paladin adds +4 to her attack rolls and adds +4 to all damage rolls made against the target of her smite. If the target of smite evil is an outsider with the evil subtype, an evil-aligned dragon, or an undead creature, the bonus to damage on the first successful attack increases to +14 damage. Regardless of the target, smite evil attacks automatically bypass any DR the creature might possess.

In addition, while smite evil is in effect, the paladin gains a +4 deflection bonus to his AC against attacks made by the target of the smite. If the paladin targets a creature that is not evil, the smite is wasted with no effect.

The smite evil effect remains until the target of the smite is dead or the undead martyr has been destroyed.

Rejuvenation (Su) As long as any of the three sacred flames yet burn in Valtaerna, these ghosts will be restored in 2d4 days.

Corrupting Touch (Su) By passing part of its incorporeal body through a foe's body as a standard action, the ghost inflicts 8d6 damage. This damage is not negative energy—it manifests in the form of physical wounds and aches from supernatural aging. Creatures immune to magical aging are immune to this damage, but otherwise the damage bypasses all forms of damage reduction. A Fortitude save (DC 17) halves the damage inflicted.

Knight of the Ghost Martyrs (Su) Unlike normal ghosts, these paladins may attack with their ghostly greatswords as normal paladins even using them to smite evil. When the ghost knights are defeated, they melt away taking their ghostly blades with them. These ghostly weapons count as being *+1 ghost touch greatswords*.

If sacked, this ossuary's bones also contain holy symbols and such. There are 1900 gp worth of holy paraphernalia buried with the dead.

1-9 Fifth Ossuary of the Blessed

Above the entry way to this chamber is a large roman numeral V. The dead fill this chamber. There are 1700 gp worth of holy symbols and prayer beads buried with the dead here. Disturbing any of this attracts the attentions of the ghost martyrs.

1-10 Sixth Ossuary of the Blessed

Above the entry way to this chamber is a large roman numeral VI. There are three newly risen ghost martyrs here. Not yet fully attuned to being ghosts, they only leave the ossuary if they hear the sounds of combat.

Ghost Martyr Paladins (3) **CR 8**

XP 4,800 each (14,400 XP total)
hp 73 each (see page 68 above)

If sacked this ossuary holds 2200 gp worth of holy symbols and jewelry.

1-11 Seventh Ossuary of the Blessed

Above the entry way is a large roman numeral VII. If disturbed this draws the ghost martyrs. This holds 1800 gp worth of holy symbols and similar paraphenalia.

1-12 Eighth Ossuary of the Blessed

Above the entry way is a large roman numeral VIII. If disturbed this draws the ghost martyrs. This holds 1600 gp worth of holy icons and a *lesser strand of prayer beads*.

1-13 Ninth Ossuary of the Blessed

This ossuary is marked with an IX. Mostly empty, the bones here are new. Still three ghosts linger here leaving only at the sounds of battle or desecration.

Ghost Martyr Paladins (3) **CR 8**

XP 4,800 each (14,400 XP total)
hp 73 each (see page 68 above)

1-14 The Chamber of Waiting

This chamber was once a foyer for the nearby shrine (see room 1-15). However, it serves now as a camp site. Three priests and six holy warriors wait here on Father MacCathlain to complete his ritual. All that they know is that he entered the First Trial of the Worthy (1-16) and disappeared. They do not know how long this will take and neither do they care. With the ability to cast *create food and water* they will wait till judgment day on their master. If captured, they will answer no questions save to say, *"His judgment cometh and that right soon, serpent."*

Three Priests of Mitra **CR 8**

XP 4,800 each (14,400 XP total)
Human cleric 9
LG Medium humanoid
Init +1; **Senses** Perception +8

DEFENSE

AC 22, touch 11, flat-footed 21 (+9 armor, +1 Dex, +2 shield)
hp 70 (9d8+30)
Fort +9, **Ref** +5, **Will** +11

OFFENSE

Speed 20 ft.
Melee mwk morningstar +9/+4 (1d8+2) or dagger +8/+3 (1d4+2/19–20)
Ranged mwk light crossbow +8 (1d8/19–20) or dagger +7 (1d4+2/19–20)
Special Attacks channel positive energy 5/day (DC 14, 5d6), holy lance (4 rounds, 1/day)

Domain Spell-Like Abilities (CL 9th, concentration +13)
7/day—rebuke death, touch of good

Cleric Spells Prepared (CL 9th, concentration +13)
5th—*dispel evil*[D], *righteous might*
4th—*air walk, freedom of movement, holy smite*[D], *spell immunity*
3rd—*create food and water, dispel magic, magic circle against evil*[D], *prayer, searing light*
2nd—*aid, bull's strength, cure moderate wounds*[D], *delay poison, spiritual weapon, status*
1st—bless, detect chaos, divine favor (2), protection from evil[D], shield of faith
0 (at will)—create water, detect magic, detect poison, stabilize
D domain spell; **Domains Good,** Healing

TACTICS

During Combat They cast *righteous might* on round one and then split between attacking along side and supporting the holy warriors.
Morale These priests fight to the death to defend the master.

STATISTICS

Str 14, **Dex** 12, **Con** 14, **Int** 8, **Wis** 18, **Cha** 10
Base Atk +6; **CMB** +8; **CMD** 19
Feats Armor Proficiency (heavy), Craft Magic Arms and Armor, Extra Channel, Shield Focus, Toughness, Vital Strike
Skills Diplomacy +5, Heal +10, Knowledge (religion) +10, Perception +8, Sense Motive +8, Spellcraft +11
Languages Common
SQ healer's blessing
Gear full plate, heavy wooden shield, masterwork morningstar, masterwork light crossbow with 10 bolts, dagger, cloak of resistance +1, healer's kit

Six Holy Warriors **CR 3**

XP 800 each (4800 XP total)
hp 37 each (see page 45 above)

1-15 Shrine of the Worthy

This humble shrine contains only a small shrine to Mitra and three aphorisms.

"Give not into greed for it rots the soul and withers the vine. Amongst the humble shall ye find the worthy."

"Despair ye mighty! For by your power and arrogance have ye fallen into darkness. Not amongst the lords of the earth but amongst the servants shall ye find the worthy."

"Beware thy enemy for he stalks you like a wicked serpent ready to consume ye with fire. The worthy knows his foe – his ways and tongues. Amongst those unafraid to speak the enemy's name shall ye find the worthy."

There is only a Mitran star burst carved upon the wall an a small shrine to kneel before besides.

These three aphorisms are hints for solving the three trials of the worthy (in Rooms 1-16, 1-22 and 1-24).

1-16 The First Trial of the Worthy

This room is adorned with countless intricately carved figures bowing before the glory of Mitra. On the southern wall are the great lords of the earth, kings and dukes, knights and warriors. On the northern walls are the peasants – a farmer, a smith, a merchant, a fishermen and a shepherd. On the eastern wall bow the priests in all their regalia from humble friars all the way up to the great Cardinals, princes of the church. They all bow in obeisance before a great Mitran sunburst.

Centered in the eastern wall just beflow the Mitran sunburst is a small niche. Upon the niche lies a silver and sapphire holy symbol not dissimilar to the one the PCs first encounter in Book I (The Nine Lessons) only larger and more ornate. Touching it activates a powerful magical trap. The holy symbol is worth 500 gp, but it is essentially a cursed item that harms anyone who touches it once a day. That hampers its resale value considerably. However, outside of the cathedral it loses its power.

First Trial of the Worthy ("Give Not into Greed")	CR 12

Type magical; **Perception** DC 30; **Disable Device** DC 30

EFFECTS

Trigger touching the sapphire and silver holy symbol; **Reset** automically resets every 24 hours

Effect spell effect (harm, 120 hit points damage, DC 18 Will save for half)

If the peasant figures are closely examined, the shepherd is actually a button (DC 30 Perception check to notice this). Pressing the shepherd causes the secret door to open and a passage is revealed into Room 1-20.

1-17 Ossuary of the Lord-Abbots

The bones of every Lord-Abbot (the mortal leaders of the Order) are here in this ossuary. Just as in all the previous ossuaries, disturbing the bones attracts the attention of the ghost martyrs. However none of the Lord Abbots are buried with any treasure or holy symbols. In fact they are buried quiet humbly.

There is only one Lord-Abbot missing if someone makes a Knowledge (religion) (DC 25 skill check). The first Lord-Abbot St. Macarius himself is not here.

1-18 Chamber of the Silent

This area is *consecrated* (as the spell) and filled with fog. At the center of the fog sits what appears to be a little girl utterly silent. This is not a little girl at all of course but a powerful celestial being known as She-Forever-Silent. She-Forever-Silent looks up any intruders and simply shakes her head but says nothing.

If any threatens her or demands information of her, she simply stands, opens her mouth and speak a *holy word*. It is then that she sheds her girlish form and reveals her true form – a brazen skinned six-winged angel wielding a flaming sword.

She-Forever-Silent has been in this vale nearly as long as Ara Mathra. She is his consort and in better times she would often be in his company. But since the calamity of Saintsbridge and the invasion of the Vale, Ara Mathra has sequestered himself in the Holy of Holies (2-9). He waits for something but she is not sure what. Even the jovial Earnan MacCathlain, who she used to sit and listen to his endless stories, has fled into the hidden part of the lower level and tries desperately to call up the dead.

She is alone and is, as she has ever been, silent. She considered leaving. With her *plane shift* ability, she could depart this plane. But she cannot. So, she remains here waiting for something to occur.

But with every passing day and every defeat she begins to suspect that nothing can be done. She felt the phoenix die and the two sacred flames extinguish. She knows what tragedies have been inflicted upon the Vale and its people and she has resolved to avenge it.

She knows that there is great wealth in the room beyond (1-19) and she believes that anyone evil will try to raid here. And so She-Forever-Silent waits here shrouded in mist and clothed like in a child's flesh. They will come eventually and when they do, she will avenge all of the wrongs done in this vale. She will do this or die trying.

She-Forever-Silent, a Chalkydri Angel CR 14

XP 38,400

NG Female medium outsider (angel, extraplanar, good)

Init +7; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., *detect evil*, *see invisibility*; Perception +23

Aura protective aura

DEFENSE

AC 30, touch 17, flat-footed 27 (+3 Dex, +13 natural, +4 sacred; +4 deflection vs. evil)

hp 126 (12d10+60)

Fort +13, **Ref** +11, **Will** +10 ; +4 vs. poison, +4 resistance vs. evil

DR 10/evil; **Immune** acid, cold, petrification, death effects; **Resist** electricity 10, fire 10; **SR** 25

OFFENSE

Speed 40 ft., fly 90 ft. (good)

Melee +2 *flaming* longsword +21/+16/+11 (1d8+8 plus 1d6 fire)

Ranged +2 *flaming* javelin +17 (1d6+8 plus 1d6 fire)

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 12th)

Constant—*detect evil*, *see invisibility*

At will—*aid*, *bless*, *consecrate*, *continual flame*, *discern lies* (DC 18), *dispel evil* (DC 19), *dispel magic*, *fog cloud*, *holy smite* (DC 18), *invisibility* (self only), *plane shift* (DC 21), *remove curse* (DC 18), *remove disease* (DC 17), *remove fear* (DC 15)

3/day—*holy word* (DC 21), *polymorph* (self only), *atonement*, *cure serious wounds*, *flame strike* (DC 19), *greater restoration*

1/day—*heal*, *raise dead*

TACTICS

During Combat

Morale She-Forever-Silent fights to the death.

STATISTICS

Str 23, **Dex** 16, **Con** 20, **Int** 18, **Wis** 18, **Cha** 19

Base Atk +12; **CMB** +18; **CMD** 35

Feats Blind-Fight, Cleave, Improved Initiative, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (longsword), Iron Will

Skills Diplomacy +19, Fly +22, Heal +19, Intimidate +16, Knowledge (planes) +19, Knowledge (religion) +16, Perception +23, Sense Motive +23, Stealth +18, Survival +19; **Racial Modifiers** +4 Perception, Sense Motive

Languages Celestial, Common, Draconic, Infernal; truespeech

Gear +2 *flaming* longsword, 2 +2 *flaming* javelins

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Protective Aura (Su) Against attacks made or effects created by evil creatures, this ability provides a +4 deflection bonus to AC and a +4 resistance bonus on saving throws to anyone within 20 feet of the angel. Otherwise, it functions as a *magic circle against evil* effect and a *lesser globe of invulnerability*, both with a radius of 20 feet (caster level 12th).

1-19 Treasury of the Order

The door to this heavy vault is made of solid iron and locked by a superior lock (DC 40). The key to this vault is in the possession of Earnan MacCathlain.

Inside the vault are countless items of silver used in various religious observances of Mitra – candle holders, sunbursts, brocade robes and other finery. These items are worth 2550 gp. These would difficult to sell anywhere but to the uncaring treasure merchants of the Goldquarter of Ghastenhall. Easier to dispose of are the chests of coinage: 10,800 cp; 13,450 sp; 12,288 gp and 1,345 pp – more than 750 lbs of coinage!

1-20 Shrine to Saint Angelo

This chamber is a shrine to the perhaps the greatest devil hunter the Order of Saint Macarius ever produced – Saint Angelo called the Wise. Saint Angelo was a cardinal of the Mitra faith and also a powerful spellcaster. In his time (which was more than a hundred and fifty years ago) he led a campaign to destroy every devil on the isle of Talingarde. He almost succeeded.

Here in this shrine it keeps a tally of his accomplishments. The number of devils he slew is truly terrifying. In Saint Angelo's lifetime he slew one hundred and eight devils ranging from the smallest imp to his greatest victory against a pit fiend known only as Hekkazar. He even fought alongside the also sainted Cynthia-Celeste (who established the abbey in Farholde).

This shrine also has an inscription in celestial that may be of interest: *"Saint Angelo travelled the world extinguishing the fires of hell. In his time he captured many tools of the wicked. Most he destroyed but a few he could not umake and so he saw them safely put aside. Behind the Angels in Iron they are forever kept safe."*

1-21 Tenth Ossuary of the Blessed

This is a room full of bones of martyrs marked with roman numeral X. This ossuary is reserved for those brothers who slew at least one devil. An inscription below the X in celestial reads "Behold those brought death to the fallen." Disturbing these bones attracts the attention of the ghost martyrs if they have somehow not yet been dealt with. Sacking these tombs yields 1200 gp in holy paraphenalia and a *pearl of power* (3rd level).

1-22 Second Trial of the Worthy

This empty chamber has a mural of a great king ordering the building of shrines and temples to Mitra. At his command knights, architects, masons, stone cutters and laborers work tirelessly to glorify the Shining Lord. Above the king is an inscription "Attend my servants! Who is a greater lord than I?"

The two letter 'e's in servant are actually buttons (Perception DC 25 to notice this). Pressing them both simultaneously deactivates the trap. Otherwise trying to leave the room engages a pressure plate and sets off the pit trap.

Second Trial of the Worthy ("Fallen into Darkness") CR 12

Type mechnical; **Perception** DC 25; **Disable Device** DC 25

EFFECTS

Trigger Pressure plate in the northern archway and hall; **Reset** automic

Effect 60-ft.-deep pit (6d6 falling damage); pit spikes (Atk +15 melee, 1d4 barbed spikes per target for 1d8+5 damage each; DC 25 Reflex avoids; multiple targets (all targets in room 1-22)

1-23 Eleventh Ossuary of the Blessed

Yet another ossuary, this one marked with the roman numeral XI. There are very few bones in this ossuary. There is an inscription here "We honor those who returned the gift of life to the fallen." To be buried here, each of these priests of Mitra successfully cast at least one *raise dead* or *resurrection*. Very few priests of Mitra ever manage this feat and it is always held in the highest of esteem. Because there are few bones here, there is also little treasure – only 600 gp. However one of the holy symbols has mounted not a sapphire but a *dark blue rhomboid ioun stone*.

1-24 Third Trial of the Worthy

At first glance, this chamber appears to be empty and largely featureless – little more than an antechamber to the library beyond (1-25). What few adornments are to be found here, show priests of Mitra studying and engaged in scholarly pursuits.

If the PCs have managed to approach quietly without Father MacCathlain having heard them, then our villains can hear soft chanting in celestial repeating *"Come to us, O martyrs, in this our darkest hour."* It repeats again and again. This is the Lord-Abbot desperately appealing for the ghost martyrs to arise in force and avenge the slaughter of Saintsbridge.

More likely, Father MacCathlain has heard the noise of the approaching PCs and has stopped chanting. Instead, preparing himself for combat.

The eastern archway that leads into this chamber has an inscription carved above it in celestial. It reads "Who is thy enemy? Who is the lord of the nine? Know him as he knows himself or be consumed with fire."

The answer is of course Asmodeus but the complication is that Asmodeus must be said in the infernal tongue where it is "Ashmodai" (pronounced ASH-moe-die). Anyone who speaks Infernal or makes a DC 20 Knowledge (religion) check knows the name of Asmodeus in infernal.

If someone passes through that archway without speaking the password, it activates a deadly trap.

Third Trial of the Worthy ("Consume Ye with Fire") **CR 12**

Type magical; **Perception** DC 31; **Disable Device** DC 31

EFFECTS

Trigger passing through the archway without saying the password
Reset automically resets every 24 hours
Effect spell effect (*flame strike*, 15d6 fire damage, DC 18 Reflex save for half damage); multiple targets (all targets in a 10-ft. cylinder)

1-25 The Library of Saint Macarius

This is the private library of Saint Macarius. Stacked everywhere are the founders private books and records. Further upon one of the tables sits a glass coffin and inside is the incorruptible corpse of Saint Macarius himself.

It is here that the Lord-Abbot Earnan MacCathlain ceaselessly prays. In better times it would be easy to describe the Lord-Abbot as jovial, rotund man of gentle temperment. But that is not the man here now. He knows what is being done to his Order. He knows with certainity that Asmodeus has sent his devils from the depths of hell to eradicate everything he cares for. He knows that if he does not succeed, that he will be the last Lord-Abbot and that a great light will go out of this world.

He is engaged in his own ritual every bit as intense as the wicked ritual the PCs performed in Book II. The corpse of the saint has become his focus and through it he speaks across the gulf of death to the spirit of every spellcaster who has ever counted himself amongst the ranks of his order. He curses quietly at the intrusion and fights with all his strength to ensure his efforts are not interrupted. He holds nothing back and he will not abandon the corpse of the saint. His time has come.

Once the Lord-Abbot is defeated, our villains can sift through the private library of Saint Macarius. These are the secret annals of the Order. One book in particular is of great interest. It has no title and written entirely in some cypher that seems to be a variation of the celestial tongue. The book has several strange illustrations that appear to be star charts. This is the Codex of Bademus the Stargazer and though it is not magical it could be quite useful in Book IV if the PCs could learn how to decode it.

If the library is studied and a Knowledge (religion) (DC 25) skill check is rolls two facts can be learned:

1) They learn the truth about the three sacred fires of the vale (see the sidebar on pg. 52).

2) They find St. Angelo's journal that records the building of the vault and gives a hint to its word of opening: "The vault is sealed with the names of the first, the teacher, the founder and the maker."

The bones of St. Macarius are holy artifacts and impart a permanent negative level and 2d6 holy damage a round to anyone evil who bears them. This level can only be removed by dropping the bones. Desecration (by spell or submersion in unholy water) stops these effects.

Story Award: For burning the library of St. Macarius and desecrating the saint's corpse award a CR 12 (19,200 XP) reward to the PCs.

What Was MacCathlain's Plan?

Lord-Abbot MacCaithlain had long been fascinated with the bones of the martyrs beneath the Cathedral. He had sensed that they held with them a great power that could be used for good. When the invasion came, he recognized immediately that this was the horde of the Fire-axe. He wrongly supposed that this meant that all of the Fire-axe's army was here. He knew the defense forces could not win this battle. But maybe he knew of an army that could.

He fled down to the Cathedral catacombs and began conducting a ritual to call for the spirits of all the martyrs contained with the ossuaries. He intended to rain an army not of a few ghost martyrs but of thousands. And at the head of that army, he would destroy the horde of the Fire-axe.

His plan will work. If by the end of winter, Earnan MacCathlain is not dead, he will call forth approximately 5,000 ghost martyrs. Exactly what this means is noted in the adventure's conclusion. More likely before that can happen the PCs will kill him. If they carefully read the archives of Saint Macarius they will realize how close they came to defeat.

Earnan MacCathlain, Lord-Abbot of the Order of St. Macarius CR 14

XP 38,400
Male human cleric 15
LG Medium humanoid
Init +7; **Senses** Perception +20

DEFENSE

AC 21, touch 13, flat-footed 19 (+6 armor, +3 Dex, +2 shield)
hp 67 (15d8)
Fort +9, **Ref** +8, **Will** +14

OFFENSE

Speed 20 ft.
Melee longsword +14/+9/+4 (1d8+2/19-20)

Special Attacks channel positive energy 7/day (DC 21, 8d6), divine presence 15 rounds/day (DC 21), holy lance 2/day (7 rounds)
Domain Spell-Like Abilities (CL 15th; concentration +19) touch of glory 7/day, touch of good 7/day

Cleric Spells Prepared (CL 15th; concentration +19)
8th—*frightful aspect, holy aura*D
7th—*greater restoration, holy word*D (DC 21), *resurrection*
6th—*blade barrier*D (DC 20), *greater dispel magic, heal* (2)
5th—*breath of light, dispel evil* (DC 19), *flame strike* (2) (DC 19), *righteous might*D, *true seeing*
4th—*dismissal* (DC 18), *divine power, freedom of movement, holy smite*D (DC 18), *restoration, tongues*
3rd—*day light, dispel magic, magic circle against evil*D, *prayer, protection from energy, searing light*
2nd—*aid, align weapon, bless weapon*D, *lesser restoration, shield other, spear of purity* (DC 16)
1st—*bless, comprehend languages, detect evil (2), divine favor, protection from evil*D, *shield of faith*
0 (at will)—*detect magic, light, read magic, stabilize*
D domain spell; Domains Glory, Good

TACTICS

During Combat The Lord-Abbot is first and foremost a spellcaster. He carries a largely ceremonial longsword and he isn't bad with it but almost never uses it in a serious fight. He has a high perception and likely will hear the PCs coming from a mile away. That means he will be ready for them. He casts *frightful aspect, true seeing* and his scroll of *greater spell immunity* on himself. He uses holy word in the first round of combat and then uses powerful attack spells like *blade barrier* and *flame strike* to great effect. He spares no resources. He will use everything in his power to win this fight.

If wounded, he is quick to restore his own wounds using *heal.* He will not retreat from this chamber nor flee the battle. The ritual he is conducting has to be done here. If the tomb of Saint Macarius is desecrated, all his work will have been for naught.

If our villains retreat, the Lord-Abbot will not follow. He returns immediately to his work. He realizes that they will almost certainly come back but he cannot help that.
Morale Lord-Abbot MacCathlain fights to the death.

STATISTICS

Str 14, **Dex** 16, **Con** 10, **Int** 14, **Wis** 20, **Cha** 14
Base Atk +11/+6/+1; **CMB** +13; **CMD** 26
Feats Channel Smite, Combat Cast, Extra Channel, Improved Channel, Improved Initiative, Leadership, Selective Channeling, Turn Undead, Weapon Focus (longsword)
Skills Diplomacy +20, Heal +23, Knowledge (religion) +19, Sense Motive +23, Perception +20, Spellcraft +19
Languages Celestial, Common
SQ aura
Gear *Scroll of flame strike (2), scroll of greater spell immunity*
Ot er Gear breastplate, healer's kit, heavy steel shield, wooden holy symbol of St. Macarius, longsword, *headband of mental prowess* +2 (intelligence and wisdom, perception skill), key to his room (2-4) and the treasury (1-19)

The Angels in Iron (Iron Golems) (2) CR 13

XP 25,600 each (51,200 XP total)

N Large construct

Init –1; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; Perception +0

DEFENSE

AC 28, touch 8, flat-footed 28 (–1 Dex, +20 natural, –1 size)

hp 129 (18d10+30)

Fort +6, **Ref** +5, **Will** +6

DR 15/adamantine; **Immune** construct traits, magic

OFFENSE

Speed 20 ft.

Melee 2 slams +28 (2d10+16/19–20)

Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft.

Special Attacks breath weapon, powerful blows

TACTICS

During Combat The golems are not sophisticated combatants. They attack the nearest enemy with all their might until it is dead. They use their breath weapon as often as they can against as many enemies as they can. What they will not do is leave their posts. They will not go any farther than the entrance to Room 1-25. If an enemy flees that far then they immediately turn around return to Room 1-26. A clever enemy could use this "programming glitch" to gain several rounds of free attacks on the mindless golems. Do not forget also that the golems do not learn (lacking an intelligence score). This glitch could be used multiple times against the golems. Award full XP for defeating the golems if they are clever enough to exploit this flaw.

Morale The golems fight to the death defending the vault and it contents to the last of their strength.

STATISTICS

Str 32, **Dex** 9, **Con** —, **Int** —, **Wis** 11, **Cha** 1

Base Atk +18; **CMB** +30; **CMD** 39

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Breath Weapon (Su) As a free action once every 1d4+1 rounds, an iron golem can exhale a 10-foot cube of poisonous gas. This gas cloud persists for 1 round; any creature within the area when the golem creates it (as well as any creature that passes through the cloud during the remainder of that round) is exposed to the cloud's poisonous effects. This poison is magically created each time the golem uses this power.

Breath weapon—inhaled; *save* Fort 19; *frequency* 1/round for 4 rounds; *effect* 1d4 Constitution damage; cure 2 saves. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Immunity to Magic (Ex) An iron golem is immune to spells or spell-like abilities that allow spell resistance. Certain spells and effects function differently against it, as noted below.

A magical attack that deals electricity damage slows an iron golem (as the *slow* spell) for 3 rounds, with no saving throw.

A magical attack that deals fire damage breaks any slow effect on the golem and heals 1 point of damage for each 3 points of damage the attack would otherwise deal. If the amount of healing would cause the golem to exceed its full normal hit points, it gains any excess as temporary hit points. An iron golem gets no saving throw against fire effects.

An iron golem is affected normally by rust attacks, such as those of a rust monster or a *rusting grasp* spell.

Powerful Blows (Ex) An iron golem inflicts one and a half times its Strength modifier and threatens a critical hit on a 19–20 with its slam attacks.

1-26 The Angels in Iron

This room contains two imposing angels made of living metal. They attack anyone who does not wear the wooden holy symbol of St. Macarius (usually this is the Lord-Abbot). The vault is covered in celestial script: *"By the four names, cursed be he who unleashes what is bound within."* To open the vault you need speak four names in order: Suchandra (the phoenix, the first dweller in the vale), Ara Mathra (the teacher), Macarius (the founder) and Angelo (the maker of the vault). Otherwise this magical vault opens for no one.

1-27 The Vault of Saint Angelo

This large vault is filled with various items taken from Asmodean temples and holy sites across Talingarde. These items were kept either because it was hoped that they could one day be used as evidence against Asmodeans who fled Talingarde or, in the case of only three, because the clergy of Mitra could not find a way to destroy them.

The religious paraphernalia includes holy symbols, sacred athame, robes, and helms. Together they are worth 4500 gp and include many wonderfully wicked items of infernal workmanship. Selling them in Talingarde will be difficult of course. No one wants to be caught trafficking in these forbidden items.

The three special items are: the *stygian mirror*, *the chalice of Aurelius Vestromo* and *Helbrand*.

The *stygian mirror* is a full length mirror made of bone and black obsidian. Bound within it are two bone devils – Skaerabus and Skraeth. They sleep for now but can be awakened by spilling sentient blood upon the mirror (a knowledge (planes) DC 25 skill check will recognize this). Once awakened they can be bargained with. They will trade nine years of service for their freedom. To be freed, the mirror must be broken. If the mirror is without a pact, they attack, eager for vengeance. You can of course keep the mirror intact and use them as permanent advisors. The mirror forces them to answer any question posed to them honestly.

The *chalice of Aurelius Vestromo* is a powerful vampiric artifact. Any vampire who drinks human blood from the chalice once a month will increase their vampiric fast healing by +2 and it takes five rounds for sunlight to destroy them (instead of the usual two – they remain staggered though). Further any blood drank from the chalice is particularly delicious and heals 2d6 hit points of damage. This chalice will also cure Prince Gaius' condition (see Act II above). Any human who drinks blood monthly from this chalice for a year will sicken, die and rise as a vampire.

Helbrand is here – a blade of black iron graven with infernal glyphs. Alas that only its blade is here. If it could be reunited with its jeweled pommel and hilt it would be fantastic weapon in the service of evil. The blade has had its tang wrapped it in leather so can still be wielded. However, incomplete is is merely(!) a *+3 good outsider bane bastard sword.* Still when held it whispers to its wielder: "remake me." It says nothing else...for now.

Story Award; Award a CR 13 award (25,600) for solving the riddle of the vault and entering. Award another CR 13 (25,600) for binding the bone devils to your service.

Skaerabus and Skraeth, bound stygian bone devils CR 11

XP 12,800 each (25,600 XP total)

LE Large outsider (devil, evil, extraplanar, lawful)

Init +9; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., see in darkness; Perception +19

Aura fear aura (5 ft., DC 19, 1d6 rounds)

DEFENSE

AC 25, touch 14, flat-footed 20 (+5 Dex, +11 natural, –1 size)

hp 105 (10d10+50)

Fort +12, **Ref** +12, **Will** +7

DR 10/good; **Immune** fire, poison; **Resist** acid 10, cold 10; **SR** 20

OFFENSE

Speed 40 ft., fly 60 ft. (good)

Melee bite +14 melee (1d8+5), 2 claws +14 melee (1d6+5), sting +14 melee (3d4+5 plus poison)

Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft.

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 12th)

Constant—*fly*

At will—*dimensional anchor, greater teleport* (self plus 50 lbs. of objects only), *invisibility* (self only), *major image* (DC 17), *wall of ice*

3/day—quickened *invisibility* (self only)

1/day—summon (level 4, 1 bone devil, 35%) (**note:** the bone devils will not use this power while bound in service to another)

TACTICS

During Combat Bone devils are masters of deception and trickery. They use their invisibility, teleportation and illusions to confuse, deceive and ambush enemies. If forced into a fair fight, they use *wall of ice* to try and divide their foes. But when battle is joined they rely upon their fearsome melee abilites to carry the day.

Morale These devils will never be fanatic followers of our villains no matter what they promise. They use their quickened invisibility and teleport away if ever reduced to 26 hit points or less.

STATISTICS

Str 21, **Dex** 21, **Con** 20, **Int** 16, **Wis** 15, **Cha** 18

Base Atk +10; **CMB** +16; **CMD** 31

Feats Alertness, Combat Reflexes, Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Quicken Spell-Like Ability (*invisibility*)

Skills Bluff +17, Diplomacy +17, Fly +21, Intimidate +17, Knowledge (planes) +16, Perception +19, Sense Motive +19, Spellcraft +16, Stealth +14

Languages Celestial, Common, Draconic, Infernal; telepathy 100 ft.

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Poison (Ex) Sting—injury; *save* Fort DC 20; *frequency* 1/round for 6 rounds; *effect* 1d3 Str damage; *cure* 2 consecutive saves. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Upper Level

2-1 Pillared Hall

The doors of the cathedral swing open to reveal a great open hall covered in frescoes depicting countless saints in Mitra's service. The ceilings rise seventy feet tall ending in ornately vaulted panels adorned with art that only be called a masterpiece. It shows the Mitra always faceless but ever present. It shows Mitra as the light of the sun, the wrath of the fire and the warmth of a mother's love. It expresses more eloquently than a library full of books on theology the true meaning of what it means to worship and revere the great god of light and life.

There can be no doubt that the PCs have managed to discover the heart of Mitran worship in Talingarde. There may be physically larger cathedrals in Ghastenhall and Matharyn, but they have nothing on this hidden wonder.

No doubt the villains only moment of remorse will be that this hall, being made entirely of stone, will be a challenge to burn.

Such a place of wonder is not undefended. The last of the legion archons are here more than ready to sell their lives to defend this sacred place.

Legion Archons (6) CR 7

XP 3,200 each (19,200 XP total)
hp 76 each (see page 59 above)

The archons may receive help. See room 2-5 for details.

At the far end of the hall is a wall of holy fire fully described below (2-9A).

2-2 Western Alcove (Shrine of the Beneficent Sun)

This chamber is a small shrine where devotees can offer prayers to Mitra's aspect as the comforter and healer. There is a great rack holding hundreds of candles and now many of them are lit in prayers to Mitra.

There is also a spiral stairway leading down to the lower level (room 1-1).

2-3 Eastern Alcove (Shrine of the Shining Lord)

This chamber is a small shrine where devotes can offer prayers to Mitra's aspect as a great warrior and a leader of the nation of Talingarde.

There is also a spiral stairway leader down to the lower level (room 1-5).

2-4 Private Chambers of the Lord-Abbot

These are the private quarters of Earnan MacCathlain, the mortal head of the Order of Saint Macarius. He is not here. He is in the lower level (room 1-25 above) communing with the ghost-martyrs of the Order trying to raise an army of the dead to purge the evil that invades the vale.

He left in such a hurry that he left the amazing lock (DC 40) on his door wide open. Unfortunately what he also forget is his prized family bible in his writing desk. Not only would this be a terrible personal loss if something happened to it, but he also has kept a journal in the back of the family bible of since he became head of the Order of St. Macarius. The journal is written in celestial but it advertently reveals how to destroy the Wall of Flame (2-9a) and access the Holiest of Holies.

One of the last entries in particular betrays MacCathlain's cause. It is presented below for use as a handout. The important bit is the sentence "Only a saint could pierce the flame!" In one poetic stroke of the pen, Earnan has revealed that a saint's body (or corpse) could dispel the Wall of Fire (2-9a). The incorrupt body of Saint Macarius himself is with Earnan in the catacombs below (1-25).

The Lord-Abbot's Journal

With the death of the Phoenix, the blessed Ara Mathra has retreated to the Holiest of Holies and has called forth a conflagration no mortal nor devil nor even angel can cross. I know some of the men believe that this reveals him a coward. But I know the truth. He must survive or all is lost.

If even one of the three sacred flames survive, then all can be rekindled. The Order of St. Macarius will weather this storm and emerge all the stronger for it.

No one suffers more than he. I see this. He agonizes that he must remain here and guard the Undying Flame. Cowardice? Hah! Who amongst us is strong enough to do what he does now? It would be base anger that drives him to slay the evil doers that assault us. Instead he has taken the victory from them. They cannot win. The slaughter of Saintsbridge has earned them nothing but damnation. Only a saint could pierce the flame!

I've tarried here too long. I must return to my prayers. Soon the ghost-martyrs will rise I will take back Valtaerna. Beware sons and daughters of darkness, I come for you!

The Emissary in White, Taranea of the Ghaele CR 13

XP 25,600

CG Medium outsider (azata, chaotic, extraplanar, good, shapechanger)

Init +5; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., *detect evil*, low-light vision, *see invisibility*; Perception +20

Aura *holy aura*

DEFENSE

AC 28, touch 16, flat-footed 26 (+4 deflection, +1 Dex, +1 dodge, +12 natural)

hp 136 (13d10+65)

Fort +17, **Ref** +11, **Will** +16

DR 10/cold iron and evil; **Immune** electricity, petrification; **Resist** cold 10, fire 10; **SR** 25

OFFENSE

Speed 50 ft., fly 150 ft. (perfect)

Melee +2 *holy greatsword* +22/+17/+12 (2d6+12)

Ranged 2 light rays +14 ranged touch (2d12)

Special Attacks gaze

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 13th)

Constant—*detect evil*, *holy aura* (DC 21), *see invisibility*

At will—*aid*, *charm monster* (DC 17), *continual flame*, *cure light wounds*, *dancing lights*, *detect thoughts* (DC 15), *disguise self*, *dispel magic*, *hold monster* (DC 18), *greater invisibility* (self only), *major image* (DC 16), *greater teleport* (self plus 50 lbs. of objects only)

3/day—*globe of invulnerability*

1/day—*chain lightning* (DC 19), *prismatic spray* (DC 20), *wall of force*

Spells Prepared (CL 13th)

7th—*holy word* (DC 21)

6th—*banishment* (DC 20), *heal* (DC 20)

5th—*flame strike* (DC 19), *raise dead*, *true seeing*

4th—*death ward*, *dismissal* (2) (DC 18), *divine power*, *restoration*

3rd—*cure serious wounds* (3), *searing light* (2)

2nd—*aid*, *align weapon*, *bear's endurance*, *lesser restoration* (2)

1st—*bless*, *command* (DC 15), *divine favor*, *obscuring mist*, *shield of faith*

0 (at will)—*detect magic, purify food and drink, stabilize, virtue*

TACTICS

During Combat Taranea uses her gaze attack to try and disrupt her foes and then begins to use her powerful spells and spell like abilities -- *chain lightning, prismatic spray* and *holy word*. If she is ever greviously hurt, she is quick to use *heal* to restore herself. She is very capable with her holy blade, but ultimately she prefers to fight using her magic. If she fights alongside the legion archons she uses her magic to support them.

Morale Taranea is a rarity in this cathedral in that she does not intend to fight to the death. This is not her holy place. If reduced to 34 hit points or less, she tries to flee -- teleporting far away. If she cannot teleport, she goes invisible and tries to escape the zone that keeps her from leaving.

In some ways this makes her more dangerous. If she escapes, she will teleport to Matharyn and do here best to tell what has happened. She will be listened to by a paladin just returned from Farholde named Sir Richard...

STATISTICS

Str 25, **Dex** 12, **Con** 20, **Int** 16, **Wis** 19, **Cha** 17

Base Atk +13; **CMB** +20; **CMD** 31

Feats Combat Casting, Combat Expertise, Dodge, Improved Disarm, Improved Initiative, Improved Trip, Lightning Reflexes

Skills Diplomacy +19, Escape Artist +17, Fly +25, Handle Animal +19, Knowledge (nature) +16, Knowledge (planes) +19, Perception +20, Sense Motive +20, Stealth +17

Languages Celestial, Draconic, Infernal; truespeech

SQ light form

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Gaze (Su) In humanoid form, a ghaele's gaze attack slays evil creatures of 5 HD or less (range 60 feet, Will DC 18 negates, shaken for 2d10 rounds on a successful save). Nonevil creatures, and evil creatures with more than 5 HD, must succeed on a DC 18 Will save or be shaken for 2d10 rounds. A creature that saves against a ghaele's gaze is immune to that particular ghaele's gaze for 24 hours. This is a mind-affecting fear effect. The save DCs are Charisma-based

Light Form (Su) A ghaele can shift between its solid body and one made of light as a standard action. In solid form, it cannot fly or use light rays. In light form, it can fly and gains the incorporeal quality—it can make light ray attacks or use spell-like abilities in this form, but can't make physical attacks or cast spells. This ability otherwise functions similarly to a bralani's wind form ability.

Light Ray (Ex) A ghaele's light rays have a range of 300 feet. This attack bypasses all damage reduction.

Spells Ghaeles cast divine spells as 13th-level clerics. They do not gain access to domains or other cleric abilities.

2-5 Domicile of the Emissary

The door to this room is locked with an amazing lock (DC 40). It is beautifully adorned but sturdy.

This well-appointed chamber is the residence of a visiting emissary – Taranea of the Ghaele. A powerful azata Taranea came to the Cathedral of Mitra Made Manifest to consult with Ara Mathra about the rising influence of Asmodeus and his minions in Talingarde. It was Taranea's hope that something could be done before it is too late.

But before the meeting could happen, the Vale of Valtaerna was attacked. Taranea has been specifically ordered to not interfere in this conflict by the great lords of the azata. Still to ignore the slaughter that transpires here is killing her. She could have left here days ago. But instead she has remained in her domicile waiting unsure what she would do if the enemy got this far.

She paces in her room, anxious to disobey her orders. Likely when the sounds of battle are finally at her doorstep, she finds an excuse. She is allowed to defend herself and now she is clearly threatened. She rushes out of her chambers 1d6 rounds after fighting with the legion archons starts in room 2-1. She attacks anyone who detects evil or is fighting an archon. No one is more surprised than the archons that Taranea is coming to their aid.

Inside this domicile is the finery of a ghaele emissary. Her gowns of gossamer silk and jewelry of fey amber are worth 1250 gp. There is also a sealed letter from an Azata lady name Brigit of the Brijidine expressing concern about Asmodeus' agents in Talingarde.

2-6 Dormitories of the Priests

These are the dwellings of the cathedral attendants and priests. They are empty now as their occupants are slain at the battle of Saintsbridge. A careful search turns up little of any interest save for a few Mitran holy texts.

2-6a Western Storage Niche

This cramped and crowded chamber is stacked full of candelabra, robes and other paraphernalia of the priesthood. It takes hours to search thoroughly. This effort is a waste of time and yields nothing of any value or interest.

2-7 The Reliquary

This chamber enshrines the life of Saint Macarius. Before Saint Macarius' mission the worship of Mitra was unknown in Talingarde. It was he who spread the light to every corner of the isle. It was Macarius who converted Darius to the worship of Mitra and thus changed the island's destiny.

But there is more here than just biography. This reliquary contains artifacts from the life of the saint. Saint Macarius' robe, his walking stick, his sash, his phylactery and holy book are all here. These ancient items are at once priceless to the Church and equally worthless. Everyone who can appreciate their value also would know they must be stolen. The phylactery is the only true magic item here -- it is a *phylactery of faithfulness* alas only useable by clerics of Mitra.

These items are the most prized possessions of the Order of Saint Macarius. Destroying them would be another nail in the Order's coffin.

Story Award: Award a CR 11 (12,800 XP) reward for destroying and desecrating these relics.

2-8 Preparatory Chamber

This ornate chamber is where the rituals of the order were prepared. Elaborate processions and ceremonies were planned and orchestrated from here almost constantly when the Cathedral was fully manned. Now it is empty of anying useful or valuable, just another reminder of the tragedy that has befallen the vale.

2-8a Eastern Storage Niche

This is another storage room not dissimilar from 2-6a above. Likewise it is crowded with common items and essential supplies. And similarly searching the crowded chamber reveals nothing of interest or value.

2-9 The Holiest of Holies (Shrine to the Undying Flame)

This is great star-shaped chamber is the holiest place in all of the Vale of Valtaerna and perhaps the single most sacred shrine to Mitra in all of Talingarde. This is the chamber of the third sacred flame and personal chapel of Ara Mathra. Ara Mathra came to this world centuries ago and has moved across the prime material plane doing countless errands in service to Mitra and other allied gods of good.

How many demons and devils have been banished by his shining mace? How many clerics and priests have been inspired by his words and deeds? The answer can only be countless.

In truth, Ara Mathra is true head of the Order of Saint Macarius. It was he who met with Macarius when the mortal solved the riddle of the three flames and taught him what was required of him. It was he who conceived of the glory that the Order has become.

And now our band of villains has found him. They have tracked him to his lair. He rises as the Wall of Fire (2-9a) fades and readies himself for battle. He has felt every death inside the vale. He knows the PC's every crime. He says nothing to them. He does not try to convince them to turn back. He knows that hour has long past. They are irredeemably locked into their path of villainy.

He readies for a fight only pausing to shed a few tears. He does not cry for those who have fallen in battle against our villains and their horde. Those valiant martyrs have left this world and beyond this veil of tears they dwell now forever in paradise. He weeps for those who still suffer at the hands of evil. He weeps for those deluded into following the way of the wicked.

And most of all he weeps for these villains who now stand before him. They know not what they do.

Ara Mathra will not run though he is certain this is a fight he cannot win. He guards the final sacred flame -- *the Flame Undying*. As long as this sacred flame burns the Order of Saint Macarius can be restored and its light will not perish from this world. If he abandons this flame, divine spellcasters of Mitra will still happen in Talngarde but in far fewer numbers. With the three flames there was a steady stream of new clerics, oracles and paladins being inducted to the Church of Mitra every year. Destroying that capacity, as has already been noted, is a major blow to the forces of good. And Ara Mathra cannot have that.

He attacks for all he is worth and he fights to the very last. When at last he is finally defeated only then does he speak. He says with his dying breath: *"It will be the son who brings your doom."* The Flame Undying burns low almost as if it were in mourning. It can be quenched forever with unholy water.

Story Award: Award your PCs a CR 13 (25,600 XP) for extinguishing all three of the sacred flames of Mitra.

2-9A The Wall of Fire

The Holiest of Holies is not any easy place to enter. It is warded with a permanent divine block against teleportation, plane shifting and similar forms of magic. Further it is guarded by a wall of furious divine fire that no mortal (or most outsiders for that matter) can survive passing through. This is no fourth level wizard spell. This wall of flame is an intense conflagration of divine wrath.

When the invasion began, Ara Mathra realized how dire the situation was. One of the properties of the third sacred flame is that it can scry (as the spell *greater scrying*) anywhere within the Vale. If he left the Cathedral, he might be able to sway the course of the battle but he would leave the Flame Undying unprotected. For all he knew that was exactly what the Enemy wanted. And so, he sealed himself up within the Holiest of Holies. He prayed to Mitra for a miracle and it was granted. A wall of divine fire closed off the Holiest of Holies. While it is sealed, Ara Mathra cannot be fought. He will wait till either the evil-doers leave the vale, the army of King Markadian arrives in the spring or Earnan succeeds in calling forth the ghost-martyr legions. Though it is killing him to see his children suffer, he waits and he weeps.

When the Vale is reclaimed, Ara Mathra will relight the three flames and induct as many new priests as he can inspire. The Order of St. Macarius will be reborn and the agents of Asmodeus will have been thwarted. There is only one weakness to the fire and there is no way the evil doers could know of it. (Except for the journal of the Lord-Abbot, see 2-4 above).

Ara Mathra, He-Who-Stands-in-Light CR 16

XP 76,800

Male advanced monadic deva
NG Medium outsider (angel, extraplanar, good)
Init +8; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., *detect evil*, low-light vision; Perception +29
Aura protective aura

DEFENSE

AC 28, touch 14, flat-footed 24 (+4 Dex, +14 natural) (+4 deflection vs. evil)
hp 189 (18d10+90)
Fort +17, **Ref** +15, **Will** +12; +4 vs. poison; +4 resistance vs. evil
DR 10/evil; **Immune** acid, cold, electricity, fire, death effects, energy drain, petrification; **SR** 25

OFFENSE

Speed 40 ft., fly 90 ft. (good)
Melee +3 *morningstar* +28/+23/+17 (1d8+11 plus solid blow)

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 14th; concentration +16)
Constant--*detect evil, water breathing*
At will--*aid*, *charm monster* (DC 18, elementals only), *discern lies* (DC 18), *dispel evil* (DC 19), *dispel magic*, *holy smite* (DC 18), *invisibility* (self only), *plane shift* (DC 19), *remove curse*, *remove disease*, *remove fear*
3/day--*cure serious wounds*, *holy word* (DC 21), *mirror image*
1/day--*heal*, *hold monster* (DC 19), *holy aura* (DC 22)

TACTICS

Before Combat As the wall of fire is being defeated, he casts *holy aura* and *mirror image* upon himself.

During Combat Ara Mathra has a lot of combat options and by this time has spent a great deal of time studying the PCs. If the PCs are well warded against spells, he uses his deadly barrage of morningstar attacks. If they have a high AC but are not shielded against magic, he employs holy smite

Morale Ara Mathra fights to the death both to avenge his fallen friends and to defend the honor of Mitra.

STATISTICS

Str 22, **Dex** 19, **Con** 18, **Int** 19, **Wis** 18, **Cha** 19
Base Atk +18; **CMB** +24; **CMD** 38
Feats Alertness, Cleave, Great Cleave, Great Fortitude, Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Power Attack, Toughness, Weapon Focus (Morningstar)
Skills Diplomacy +25, Fly +29, Intimidate +25, Knowledge (planes) +25, Knowledge (religion) +25, Perception +33, Sense Motive +29, Stealth +25, Survival +25, Swim +23; **Racial Modifiers** +4 Perception
Languages Celestial, Draconic, Infernal; truespeech

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Solid Blow (Su) If a monadic deva strikes an opponent twice in 1 round with its mace, that creature takes an extra 1d8+10 points of damage.

The Wall can be destroyed by touching it with the corpse of St. Macarius after the two lesser fires are extinguished. Ironically it will be the founder of the order who will seal its destruction. However, the saint's bones are holy artifacts and dangerous for evil individuals to touch (see room 1-25 above for details). Further even getting close to the wall of fire does 6d6 points of holy and fire damage a round (no save). But if the PCs can touch any part of St. Macarius' corpse to the Wall, then it forever extinguishes. The Holiest of Holies is now open.

Story Award: Award a CR 12 (19,200 XP) reward for extinguishing the wall of fire.

Concluding the Adventure

With the defeat of Ara Mathra and the extinguishing the third sacred flame, the PC's mission in Valtaerna is at an end. They have accomplished Cardinal Thorn's wicked errand. The Order of St. Macarius is finished. With the first spring thaw, Thrane uses his agents to spread the Tears of Achlys. Worse, he infects unsuspecting dupes and sends them by ship to the other two major cities of Talingarde. He even sends riders to the Heartlands infected with the deadly affliction. Soon the Tears of Achlys sweep across Talingarde taking its toll by the thousands.

Pilgrims wheel carts full of dying loved ones to the Vale of Valtaerna to receive the healing light of Mitra. And what do they find when they get there? They find ashes and death. The light of Mitra has failed them.

As our villains slay the angel, Tiadora needs no one to tell her that the mission is done. She can sense the death of the powerful celestial agent and teleports to the ruins of Sanctum to survey their work. She finds the PC and bows before them in a suprising display of actual gratitude. Her words briefly lack her usual sarcasm.

"Well done, my lords. I am pleased and the master is pleased. He sends his regards." With that, she hands over a small silk pouch containing 50,000 gp in tear shape sapphires.

"Alas, that there is still more that needs doing to complete Asmodeus' will. With the coming of spring, the Fire-Axe moves his horde against the city of Daveryn. Your army, what remains of it, is needed there. You are needed there. Our master Cardinal Thorn instructs you to depart this place and find passage to Daveryn to rendezvous with the army of Sakkarot Fire-Axe. You may even help personally with the sack of the city if you wish. Once Daveryn is ashes we will speak again."

Did the PCs keep their deeds a secret?

Did anyone in Lord Roderick's band actually escape? Did Taranae teleport away? Was the watchtower manned all the time or did travelers see the devastation of Saintsbridge? Did the PCs foolishly show a glimmer of mercy and actually let a few of the peasants of Sanctum live? Did Timon Lotte trade information for the lives of his granddaughters?

There are dozen ways that the PCs could have missed someone. There were thousands in this vale. The mountains around Valtaerna are difficult to climb but not impossible. If given time a single hardy survivor might have climbed out if the PCs allowed patrols to be lax.

If so, then as Tiadora is about to teleport away, there is a resounding blast of trumpets. There is an army at the gates of Valtaerna and not just any army -- the grand army of the south. The King of Talingarde has come at last leading an army of twenty thousand soldiers and the full might of the Knights of the Alerion. His army has ridden hard through the winter to make their way here.

They were brought here by the word of one paladin --Sir Richard Thomasson, with the death of his father now Lord of Havelyn. It was he who found the survivor, listened and believed. It was he who brought the news to the king and also told the tale of what happened in Farholde. It was he who told of what he had pieced together about Balentyne.

"We face not bugbears and beasts from the north, my lord. We face the followers of dread Asmodeus. Yes, Asmodeus. I say his name! Let us be open about our foe and hide no longer behind deceptions and doubletalk. The light of truth has ever been the prince of hell's worst enemy."

"I have heard what they are doing and I march to Valtaerna to slay these monsters. My liege, do I march alone?"

The king rose. *"Too long have I idled here in Matharyn. I have listened to the advice of generals and logisticians who have ever urged delay. And every day I receive reports of fresh atrocity in the north. You say Asmodeus is behind this. I believe you for who but a devil could have conceived of such destruction? I fear we do not yet know the fullness of what these devils have conceived."*

"Alone? Not alone, good sir knight. I march with thee."

Story Award: Award a CR 13 (25,600 XP) reward if the PCs managed to perform their mission while leaving no witnesses.

What if they failed?

If one of the three sacred flames remains lit by winter's end, then eventually all three will be reborn. If Ara Mathra survives then he will rekindle the flames. The Order of Saint Macarius has weathered this storm and though diminished will survive.

If Earnan MacCathlain is still alive by spring's first day then as the darkened skies of winter leave Valtaerna he succeeds and calls forth an army of 5,000 ghost martyrs.

Keep note of these events. They will determine how the PCs leave Valtaerna and play a critical role in determining what roll the PCs can play in the sack of Daveryn in Book IV wherein the Way of the Wicked continues...

Troubleshooting the Adventure

My adventures didn't want to face the phoenix/attack the Gardens of Serenity/storm the Cathedral. What now?

It is true that after their victory at Saintsbridge, there is nothing requiring the PCs to do another thing. They can sit in the ruins of Sanctum and wait all winter. However, remember that Thorn is still likely scrying them. If he sees them sit and do nothing for a month, he will grow concerned. What is the hold up? Eventually, he will send Tiadora to check up on them. Tiadora's mission is simple -- get them back into action.

This actually might work for the PCs if they are trying to go rogue against Cardinal Thorn. Tiadora is no longer the inaccessible, undefeatable enemy she once was. She is a CR 14 devil -- hardly untouchable by a group of 11th through 13th level PCs. If the PCs do ambush Tiadora, she flees immediately. When she returns, she returns with all of the Nine Sisters (see pg. 12). Thorn tries one last time to keep the Ninth Knot in line.

If your PCs do somehow avoid one of those three challenges, they are going to be missing out on a lot of XP and treasure. We give a whole host of suggestions both in this book for side quests in Ghastenhall and in Book One for side quests throughout the isle of Talingarde.

I've had a character die during the course of this mission. How do I send a replacement?

Here are three suggestions how to introduce new PCs.

There is a prison in Sanctum. The priests of Talingarde have capture a true villain (or villains). They were going to ship this dastard to Branderscar in the spring but never got the chance.

Cardinal Thorn learns that one of his agents has died. Worried that an understrength Ninth might fail, he sends a replacement to Valtaerna. Fortunately, he has been recruiting only the worst sort of scum.

The good celestials of Valtaerna have a fallen angel/devil captured beneath the Cathedral. He is actually pinned to the wall in 1-13 (being guarded the ghost-martyrs) by spikes of enchanted silver. If someone freed this outsider, it would have good reason to aid them.

Thirteen levels of villainy is enough! How do I end this campaign here?

Destroying Ara Mathra was the ultimate goal of this campaign all along. With his destruction, the King loses the blessings of Mitra and his army loses its heart.

"Tears of the Blessed" As a Stand-Alone Adventure

Though "Way of the Wicked" is intended to be a long running campaign that takes four villains from 1st to 20th level, "Tears of the Blessed" could be run as a stand-alone adventure with very little modification.

You are agents of Asmodeus here to assassinate Ara Mathra, a hated enemy of the dark god. You deliver nothing to Thrane. Instead, he is simply a traitorous priest who is seliing out the Mitran faith. Cut out the downtime and sidequests entirely. In a one-shot, the PCs need no downtime. Let's get straight to the action!

When you meet the Fire-Axe, he isn't an old friend. He is a savage warlord that can provide troops to your unholy cause. You must negotiate with him for warriors to storm the Vale. You recruit beasts. Dessiter, an agent of Asmodeus gives you Hell hounds and you are ready for war!

Saintsbridge runs exactly as written and then you storm the Vale and take out its inhabitants one by one. Lord Asmodeus will not be satisified until you spilled the blood of every angel in this Vale.

At the second battle of the Lords of Tamberlyn, the Fire-Axe personally beheads King Markadian V called the Brave. Belinda, his only heir? Belinda is a brat who does not rise to the occasion. She flees the country.

You should probably devise one more climactic battle where during the battle the PCs get to kill Sir Richard once and for all. The people desperate for peace at last, pray to Asmodeus for relief. At last Talingarde is given into the hands of the wicked.

This adventure is too hard. There is no way my PCs are going to slay a phoenix and all those good celestials!

It is easy to make the enemies less challenging. Suchandra could be a young phoenix (apply the young template). Maybe destroying even one sacred flame greatly weakens every celestial in Valtaerna. They suddenly receive a -2 to hit penalty and have three quarters hit points. Maybe they lose the ability to use their most potent magic ability.

Remember that every party of adventurers is different and it is important to adapt to the realities of your own game. Ultimately, as long as everyone is having fun, you are doing a great a job!

Gazetteer: Ghastenhall

Note: This article builds on the *Talingarde Gazetteer* found in Book One: Knot of Thorns.

Ghastenhall

NG metropolis
Corruption +2; **Crime** +0; **Economy** +4; **Law** -1; **Lore** +4; **Society** +2
Qualities Academic, Prosperous
Danger 10

DEMOGRAPHICS

Government hereditary autocracy
Population 82,000 (65,600 humans; 10,600 dwarves; 3200 halflings, 1620 half-elves; 650 elves, 80 aasimar; 250 other)
Notable NPCs
Lord Hadrian of Ghaster, Duke of Ghastenhall (N male human aristocrat 5/rogue 5)
Cardinal Leo Arestes (LG male human aristocrat 7/cleric 1)
Brother Cassius the Stricken (LG male half-elf cleric 13)
"Prince" Gaius Vestromo (NE male vampire human sorcerer 10/aristocrat 1)
Mayor Samuel Tynes (NG male human expert 7)
Evelynne Grandel (LN male human aristocrat 2/expert 5) banker and richest person in Ghastenhall
Baron Albert of Harlyn (LG male human fighter 10), Captain of the Baron's personal guard
Thane Turin Brightmetal (LG male dwarf fighter 4/expert 6), respected dwarven leader
Professor Tiberius Feign (N male old human wizard 17), tenured professor of arcana at Ghaster University and one of the most powerful wizards in Talingarde

MARKETPLACE

Base Value 16,000; **Purchase Limit** 100,000 gp ; **Spellcasting** 7th level divine, 9th level arcane
Minor Items nearly all are available; **Medium Items** 4d4; **Major Items** 3d4

One of the three great cities of Talingarde, Ghastenhall is by the far the most cosmopolitan and liberal. Compared to the orthodoxy of Matharyn and the rigid legalisms of Daveryn, Ghastenhall is a hub of trade, art, theater, learning and culture.

Ghastenhall is a city with one foot in the past and one foot in the future. The duke is the last gasp of the old Barcan nobility that used to rule this island. His grandfather marched to war against the Victor. Of course, the old duke was also wise enough that when defeated he swiftly swore fealty to the new king. Still there is a lingering wound there that has never entirely healed.

But at the same time, Ghastenhall is at the forefront of Talirean art and culture. Virtually every new book and play written in Talingarde comes from this city. Most new music and fashion are born here. Almost anything truly new in the kingdom likely originated here. If you know what's happening in Ghastenhall, you know what's happening in Talingarde.

The Domain of the Mad Duke

There is a persistent rumor that Duke Hadrian is mad. He does not stop these rumors and in fact subtly encourages them. There is an oft circulated story for example of how he once roamed the entire Castle Ghasten in nothing but his crown. He even had dinner and received foreign dignitaries this way, the tale insists

This story is not exactly true though it has a kernel of truth. The duke often dresses outlandishly wearing garments of vibrant colored silk. The royal tailor decided this was inappropriate and took it upon himself to replace the duke's entire wardrobe with more fashionable and presentable attire. The tailor was certain that when the Duke saw the garments, he would recant from his eccentricities. Instead the duke strolled out in the buff in front of the tailor, tossed the tailor's garments into his face and told him "I'd rather wear nothing than this rubbish" and stormed back into his private chambers.

The duke is actually a very shrewd and capable noble. Though he plays the part, he is not a devout Mitran. He cares little about the gods (though he would never admit that publicly) and prefers to leave praying to priests. He realizes that the Fire-Axe's invasion is not the work of disorganized savages. Something guides this invasion and though he is unsure exactly who it is, he is sure of its goal – to destroy the House of Darius.

Maybe this unknown group will succeed, maybe it will fail. But either way, the Duke intends to survive the coming upheavals and keep his title. He will aid the King in this time of war, but he's been stockpiling cash in his treasury. If the army must march, fine. Duke Hadrian will send it. But he's not going personally. He will remain here with large, politically unattached mercenary force safekeeping his family and himself. Come what may, he will be ready.

By playing a little crazy, he ensures that King Markadian V will excuse his absence from the front lines. It also means that this unseen enemy might underestimate him. It is in short a ruse. Ghastenhall is not ruled by a mad man. It is ruled by perhaps the most intelligent, ruthless man among the Talirean aristocracy today.

The Mitrans love their lost causes. They write parables about fighting to the last and giving all for their god and king. That is their choice. As for Duke Hadrian of Ghaster, he plans to stay in power come what may.

Lost causes are for fools.

Farmland
Turnsborough
Snakerly Trail
Farmland
Old Lighthouse Way
Barleybell
Turnsborough Way
Downerly
Handelbark Way
Goldquarter
Greedily Rd.
Shelton St.
Kingspeace
The Victor's Way
Wrightsbridge
Wrightsway
Wrongside
10
Fishgut Rd.
Iris Way
Whitequarter
Saltsquarter
Saltbrick Way
Wellspring River
Tuppence Street
Tuebelow
Old Weatherby Lane
6
8
9
Crabtrap Row
Red Quarter
Longshot Lane
1
3
4
King's Hook
Lord's Quarter
Faithful Way
2
7
Priest's Quarter
Weatherby
Sothisby Way
5
Scarpers
N
Ghastenhall
Delta of the Godscar River
1" = 1/4 mile

The City Upon The SCAR

The city of Ghastenhall sits upon one of the most prominent natural features of Talingarde – the great Godscar river. The Talireans consider the mighty Godscar to run from Cambrian Bay to Lake Tarik but in fact the same geologic feature actually divides Talingarde in twain running fom the bay to the northern sea. This flooded fault line slashes through two mountain ranges and hints at the violent prehistoric birth pangs of the Isle of Talingarde long ago. The dwarves, long accustomed to the havoc the earth can wreak have a saying "Father Mountain does not sleep forever". The same could be said of the mighty Godscar. It will not sleep forever. But fortunately for Ghastenhall, it sleeps for now.

Today the Godscar river is the life blood of the city. The Godscar is a massive body of water. Though not that long it is wide and it routinely manages to be a mile across. At its widest it is over five. Some veteran river sailors remark that the Godscar is not a river. It is a long lake that connects Lake Tarik to the sea. This is not far from the truth.

The Godscar teems with fish and sea life. The scarpers (slang for freshwater fisherman) head out every morning with the dawn in their little boats and cast their nets into the thriving lake. Their hauls of trout, char, steelhead and river salmon quickly make their way into the fish markets alongside the southern docks and by lunch fill ten thousand cooking pots throughout the city.

Every once in a great while a monster comes down river from the northern seas – often a bunyip or a giant moray eel – and makes trouble on the lake. Old scarpers still wag about the time a sea serpent took up residence near the mouth of the Godscar. The so-called Sea Devil ate a dozen men before the duke hired some monster hunters to catch it. When it was dragged out of the sea it measured seventy two feet tip to tail. Its skull still decorates a famous eatery in the tenth quarter of town known as the Devil's Diner. The food is excellent and, if you book in advance, you can actually sit in the booth with the head looming above known to local's as the Devil's Bite.

It is difficult to overestimate the importance of the Godscar to Ghastenhall. The reason the Castle Ghasten is here is to watch the entrance to the river. The reason there are so many people here is the bounty of the river. The reason the soil here is so rich here is ancient topsoil laid down by the river. The Cambrian Bay and the saltwater port have made the city rich, but the Godscar river is what allowed the city even to exist. Ghastenhall has been sometimes been called the Gift of the Godscar and this is undeniably true.

A City Without Loyalties

You need only glance at the Ghastenhall coat of arms to see that the city of Ghastenhall has shifted masters many times. In the center is the Mitran Sun. In the upper left quarter is the Darian blue and white. In the upper right is the Barcan Griffon. The Red and Green of the backgrounds are colors used by the old Iraen tribesmen who once owned this isle before the Talireans came.

Yes, Ghastenhall has known many masters. The city is wise enough to bow before whoever holds the throne, but the truth is that most Ghastens (sometimes derogatorily called Ghastlies by outsiders) think of themselves as their own tribe. It is to themselves that their first loyalty will always lie.

Ghastenhall claims to be the oldest city in Talingarde. This might actually be true though no one can be certain. It has a certain sense to it. The rise overlooking the Godscar where the Castle Ghasten currently stands is a natural defensive position. The nearby river and sea are rich sources of food. And freshwater is available in the Godscar. Further, the surrounding foothills of the Eastern Ansgarian mountains are rich with strong stone. If you look carefully in some of the old quarries you can see evidence of crude stone blocks cut from the pits by tools not made of iron. Men have made this place their home for countless centuries.

But even if there is somewhere on the island an older settlement, it matters not. The Ghasten think of themselves as an old and established folk. They take the long view on politics and power struggles. Maybe House Darius and the Mitrans will reign for a hundred more years. Who can say? But will they reign forever? Certainly not.

There are Ghasten alive today who remember when the current duke's grandfather marched to war against Darius to support the last Barcan king. Buy them an ale and they'll tell you now what they said then. It was a mistake to get tangled up in such struggles. The city of Ghastenhall was not directly threatened. What did it matter whether the kingdom flew the colors of Darian Blue or Barcan Red and Green? Either regime would need their port and need their river.

This lesson has been taken to heart by the current duke. The battle against the Victor was a disaster for Ghastenhall. More than two thousand sons of the city died upon that battlefield. When the bodies returned home the City upon the Scar became a city of funerals. Now war has come again to Talingarde. There is no doubt the bugbear horde must be defeated. The question for the duke is how this can be done without repeating the same tragedy.

The Fifteen Quarters

I. Lord's Quarter

Lord's Quarter is a small city unto itself and the nobles, upper class and wealthy population who dwell here need never leave if they so choose. It is the only part of town that is walled and it has but a single gate -- The Duke's Gate (often simply the Gate since its the only gatehouse most city dwellers every encounter). Beyond the gate is King's Hook Row which leads straight to the Castle Ghasten where the Duke lives and garrisons his personal guard. Technically the Duke's Gate is supposed to be open to all citizens but in reality the guards there often turn back the obviously poor or vagrant.

The Lord's Quarter has grown organically over the years and there is absolutely no order to its arrangement. Manor houses are right next to merchants and often a long row of businesses will have a few homes scattered amongst it. In fact, the larger, richer estates are ringed with luxury shops.

In every other part of the city, Lord's Quarter is simply called "The Lorker" (sometimes spelled Lorquar). "He's gone Lorkers" is a local saying that means "he struck it rich, probably through some dishonest means."

II. Whitequarter

The single largest portion of the city, this crescent-shaped quarter surrounds the Lord's Quarter from the Cambrian Bay to Faithful Way. This is where the artisans work. In many ways when people speak broadly of Ghastenhall, they are actually talking about Whitequarter. Whitequarter is the most representative part of the city and almost half the population lives in this one quarter.

III. Priest's Quarter

Somewhat misnamed, actually only a small percentage of this quarter is occupied by priests. However it is the location of the single largest church in Ghastenhall – the Cathedral of Mitra the Fire Undying (often simply called 'the Cathy' by less reverent locals) and is the seat of the Cardinal of Ghastenhall.

A better description of the Priest's Quarter would be the Scholar's Quarter as this one area houses almost all of Talingarde's centers of higher learning. Besides a handful of academies in Matharyn and the Daveryn Conservatory, if you are going to university in Talingarde, you are going here. The Universities of Ghaster, Heldynhall, Tynebrucks, Fairchester, Canterly and True Ghaster all crowd this quarter. The Library of Ghaster serves them all and collects books from across the world.

The Universities of Ghastr and True Ghaster are famous rivals and compete in everything from track, rowing contests on the Wellspring River, and in acquiring the best researchers. Their names arose because two centuries ago when they were founded, the Barcan king ordered the building of Ghaster University without notifying the duke. The duke, incensed at being cut out of the loop, commissioned his own university calling it True Ghaster. The two universities have been rivals ever since.

The priests and scholars who rub elbows also famously dislike each other. The priests wear blue robes and the scholar wear black so when there is a disagreement there is a famous saying "blue beats lack." In other words, the Church remains more politically powerful than scholars.

IV. Saltsquarter

Saltsquarter is where the fisherman who cast their nets into the salt water of the Cambrian bay dock their boats. They have a stern rivalry with the freshwater fisherman of Scarpers (see below).

This is also where ocean-going vessels dock and is the busiest port in Talingarde. As a result, you can encounter peoples from all across the world here. It is not uncommon to see lizardfolk, minotaurs, ogres and even stranger creatures in this quarter. They are tolerated as long as they keep the peace but also seen with suspicion.

V. Goldquarter

Goldquarter is the banking and financial quarter of Ghastenhall. It is also home to a vast network of speculators in jewels and precious metals making it one of the finest places in all of Talingarde to sell treasure. Even better, the merchants of Goldquarter are as a rule completely unconcerned with where the precious metals they broker came from. These merchants will happily hawk a holy symbol or a church treasure.

Greedily Lane runs right through the middle of Goldquarter. Local legend has it that the road got this name after a bank tried to overcharge the then Duke for a loan. Regardless, virtually no one actually lives in Goldquarter. It almost entirely consists of businesses and trading houses. In many ways, the Goldquarter is wildly ahead of its time. This is a place where modern attitudes about money and wealth are common place and greed rules all.

VI. Kingspeace

Kingspeace has a reputation for being the most boring place in the city. This small quarter, largely populated by traders, artisans and farmers deserves that reputation.

VII. Wrightsbridge

This is Ghastenhall's industrial heart. The sound of smithing and manufacturing never ceases here. This also means that Wrightsbridge is famous for something else -- its legendary terrible smell. "He smells Wrighty" is another way of saying "he smells indescribably awful."

VIII. Tuebelow

Local lore states that Tuebelow got its name from a magistrate who pronounced of the quarter "For every one that goes to heaven, two below." The name stuck and a duchy mapmaker couldn't spell. Hence Tuebelow.

This is rather unfair. Tuebelow is not a bad part of the city. Instead this young quarter is the heart of Ghastenhall's newly emergent middle class. Wide and spread out compared to most of the city, this is a comfortable place to live.

IX. Weatherby

Once Weatherby was a small farming community on the city's outskirts. Now it has been thoroughly absorbed into the city itself. Still at its heart, this remains a quiet farming community. The townspeople of Weatherby take pride in being rural even though their quarter is completely surrounded by city. The worse thing they can say about a local is that "he's gone Ghastly" – Ghastly being their pet name for Ghastenhall.

Still, Ghastenhall is eating Weatherby whether the old guard like it or not. Virtually the entire western part of Weatherby has been bought up by artists and theater owners. With the building of the new Barrington-in-the-Round Theater near the quarter's edge, it seems certain that Weatherby's days as a farming community are numbered. This dire state of affairs is discussed endlessly by old Weatherbians on their porches.

X. Scarpers

Scarpers takes its name from the old city slang for those who fish the Godscar River. 'Scarpers' and 'Salties' (those who fish the salt water Cambrian Bay) have long had a serious rivalry. Usually, this rivalry manifests only as quiet grumbling. But every once in a while, there is some isolated incident of violence.

Locals know that, despite the terrible smell near the river, that the absolute best places to eat in Ghastenhall (other than perhaps the rich and unafforable dining halls in the Lord's Quarter) are the restaurants along Sothsby Way. Fresh river fish from Scarpers and farmer's produce from Weatherby combine to create culinary delights.

XI. The Red Quarter

The Red Quarter is the bad part of town. Hardly a week goes by that the duke does not have the Cardinal urging him to raid this place and shut down its pits of depravity. And each week the duke promises that yes it will be done as soon as there are resources to do so. But that day never seems to come. Why? Why is such a pit tolerated?

The Red Quarter is Ghastenhall's dirty secret. There is no reason that foreign ships shouldn't stop at Matharyn instead of proceeding up the Cambrian Bay to do their business at Ghastenhall. But the truth is that most give Talingarde's capitol a pass. Why?

After the great danger of crossing the open sea, where would rather take your liberty? Would you stop at the very religious and orthodox port of Matharyn or would you rather continue up the bay to Ghastenhall with its Red Quarter full of bars, brothels and betting parlors? The answer to that question for most sailors is obvious. And so the duke discovers once again that he has better things to do, the Church fumes and the city coffers swell.

XII. Downerly

Downerly used to be a farming community but when the port trade got too busy in Saltsquarter, traders came through and bought nearly the whole quarter. Now Downerly is almost nothing but warehouses. The Old Lighthouse is just inside this quarter and still operates helping ships to navigate the Cambrian Bay into Ghastenhall's thriving ports.

XIII. Wrongside

Once this quarter was known by the rather bland name of Farmington. But no one calls it that anymore. Instead, with most of the farmers gone, this rough badland of farmed-out fields between Wrightsway and the three hills is universally called Wrongside. If you can't afford to live anywhere else in Ghastenhall, you can afford to live here.

XIV. Barleybell
XV. Turnsborough

The exact borders of the farming towns of Barleybell and Turnsborough are uncertain. They are both claimed by two rural barons. Anything north of Ghastenhall that has farmland on it is either Barleybell if its to the west or Turnsborough if its more easterly. Exactly where the dividing line lies is uncertain. Regardless these two farming communities are Ghastenhall's bread basket.

Ten Places of Interest in Ghastenhall

1. Castle Ghasten (Old Ghastenhall)

Properly the Castle Ghasten is Ghastenhall. The city that shares its name developed around the castle which was built to command control of the great Godscar river. These days to avoid confusion the castle is called the Castle Ghasten. This is the the palace of the duke and his family. It is also the seat of government in this region and where all official business is conducted.

Once a week from the noon bell till sunset the Duke holds an open court. Any who wish can come and speak to the Duke. Usually this consists of an endless parade of peasants venting some petty land complaint or minor nobility trying to bend the duke's ear in hopes of receiving money. The current duke weathers it all with good humor and even sporadically decides to help some local in need of actual assistance.

2. Grand Cathedral of Mitra the Fire Undying

One of largest churches of Mitra in Talingarde, this is not just a center of worship. This is an institution and center of business. The Cathy is where the Cardinal of Ghastenhall conducts his court. The Cardinal is the second most important person in Ghastenhall (below the duke). The Church owns massive holdings both in and outside the city and it is in this court that the business of all those holdings is conducted.

3. The Old Barcan Cemetery

This is the oldest cemetery in Ghastenhall. It has a reputation for being haunted and this reputation is not undeserved. From within his mausoleam, arguably the third most influential person in Ghastenhall keeps his court. This is the court of Prince Gaius Vestromo, vampire lord of Ghastenhall (see Act Two, Event Five for more details about the prince).

The Prince has immense influence throughout the city. Virtually every criminal enterprise can be traced evenutally back to Prince Gaius. Few know they serve a vampire, of course. The Prince's potent mind magic makes sure of that. But if a criminal enterprise has a shadowy master who the underlings hardly ever see, that is probably just another one of Prince Gaius' aliases.

Does the Duke of Ghastenhall know about Prince Gaius? Here is one of the most closely guarded secrets in Ghastenhall – yes, of course the Duke knows about his grand uncle Gaius. As long as Prince Gaius does not endanger the city and feeds only on the poor and vagrant, the Duke laughs at tales of vampires.

Once a year however on the night of the duke's birthday, Prince Gaius pays his great-great-great-great grand nephew a visit. That night, the Prince of the undead whispers secrets to the duke and then disappears. These secrets always concern either dangers to the safety of the city or ways the House of the Duke may thrive through ruthless action. Over the years, some Dukes have convinced themselves this is only a nightmare. The current Duke is not so foolish. He recognizes this visit as the gift that it is.

4. The Crowley Estate

This is one of the very few uninhabited estates in the Lord's Quarter. Using his considerable wealth, Cardinal Thorn has had Brother Barnabus Thrane acquire it for use as a safe house. It is this estate that will serve as the PC's base of operation while they are in Ghastenhall. No campaign are events are planned in the course of the PCs owning this estate. However if you want to include a sidequest, this estate is a fine place to stage it. See page 10 above for suggestions.

5. The Golden Palace

Located at the intersection of Crabtrap Row and Longshot Lane in the Red Quarter, the Golden Palace is Ghastenhall's most infamous center of vice and violence. Owned by the enigmatic Mister Martigan Vex (male CN tiefling rogue 7), it is hard to catalog just how many vices are catered to. Part brothel, part speak-easy, part opium den, part casino and part pit-fighting arena, there is little not for sale here.

6. The Grand Market

Once a season (save for winter), Ghastenhall hosts a great three day market located in the heart of Whitequarter. For those three days, the city goes wild with commerce. The base value and purchase limit both increase by 20% and 1d4 bonus medium and major magic items are available for sale for three days only! One of these markets happens the month the PCs spend in Ghastenhall. Perhaps they want to attend?

7. The Library of Ghaster

The Library Ghaster is actually a wonder of Talingarde. This open library charges only a pittance (5 sp a day) for access to its stacks. Inside is the single greatest collection of books, tomes ands scrolls in all of Talingarde. This is the preferred haunt of Barnabus Thrane, who is a member of the library's staff. It is also a fine place to do research. Spending a day here grants a +4 circumstance bonus to an Knowledge skill check.

There is however one great hole in the Library's collections. The library has no books at all about Asmodeus, his worship or evil outsiders. That lore is forbidden by Church edict.

8. Victory Circle

This large open plaza has at its center a gigantic marble statue of King Marcadian I called the Victorious – the Victor himself. The Victor stands triumphant on a crest of white skyros holding aloft a sword in his right hand and the banner of Mitra in his left. The statue is surrounded by fountains and on clear days great throngs of city dwellers gather here to chat and stroll.

Victory Circle is also famous for something else – its mad men. Lines of prophets, crazies, cranks and crackpots gather here to regale the passing populace on a host of subjects. Most of them are simple homeless nuts ranting about the end of the world. But every once in a while a true oracle appears and speaks here. The Church of Mitra only barely tolerates this gathering of blasphemers.

9. Barrington-in-the-Round Theater

Ghastenhall's nicest and newest theater. This theater has raised controversy by allowing women to join the cast. This is also the theater that made the reputation of famed thespian William Marcus Marlowe, the beloved bard of Barrington. Is he still alive? If so, he is performing here! Now! Not the "Fall of Amberlyn" I'm afraid. That is so last season.

This season he will be starring as the lead in "Five Against Fortune". This play is a rousing tale of five heroes who manage to outwit a vicious, ludicrously angry Asmodean king, woo his daughter and beat his pet devil. Its a big boisterous performance with Marlowe cast as that rapscallion with a heart of gold – Brandon of Braskerly. It features sword fights, singing, romance and a funny bit with a dog.

10. Lasthome

This old manor house sits on a rise overlooking Wrongside just past Snakerly Trail. No one lives in this house and by reputation this house is haunted. That is not true. This house is not haunted. Instead, a group of duergar have murdered the last owners and occassionally venture out at night (invisibly) to find a few dwarves to murder.

How do they get here? There is breach in the basement that leads deep into the depths of the earth. There caves connect with passages that run Talingarde's length. This sunless world is a place of great danger and mystery.

Ten Interesting Facts About Ghastenhall

1. Ghastenhall food is famously spicy.

Thanks to an abundance of foreign merchants in this port town, spices are not rare in Ghastenhall. That means that many of the quintessentially Ghasterly foods are devilishly hot. The most famous local food of all "Scarper's Stew" is a blend of river-caught seafood simmered in a broth made of onions, herbs, fish bones and crab shells then spiced to the point of being bright red and fiery hot.

2. Rowing is the favorite sport

River boat rowing is the favored sport of the upper crust. The teams often come from the various colleges but even the town watch has rowing teams. Watching a set of rowing is often a picnic-like affair and involves sitting on the banks of the Wellspring during the summer months watching the boats go by. Very genteel indeed.

3. The other favorite sport is Rugagug.

Rugagug is basically a gang fight with a few rules and if you're lucky a referee. The goal in Rugagug is to get a rather strange shaped ball between two posts no matter who tries to stop you. There are a few other rules and subtleties, fans insist, but to outsiders it can be difficult to tell.

4. Ghastenhall is the only place in Talingarde to reliably get rum.

The "Salties", the saltwater fisherman, have developed a taste for rum doubtless from hanging out with foreign sailors. Sugar cane does not grow in Talingarde so it must either be imported (expensive) or smuggled (dangerous). The alternative was to use local sugar beets. They make a passable rum substitute except that thanks to the beets the booze is blood red. The scarpers may like their beer, but the salties will take blood rum over it every time.

5. Many street names in Ghastenhall are quite silly

There is a law that anytime the city expands the new street is presented before the duke and he gets to name it. In the past a number of dukes have not taken this duty seriously. That is why Ghastenhall has a Leavemebe Lane, Fetchmeabrandy Street, Rubella's Rosy Rump Road, and the most powerful wizard in town's new tower is on Abracadabra Way. These silly names often gets shortened in day to day use. Ruby Road is far easier and quicker to say than Rubella's Rosy Rump. Some of these silly names have become quite famous. Everyone knows you find the banks on Greedily Road.

6. Ghastenhall still honors Asmodeus's main festival

Well, sort of. Everyone knows that the major festival of Asmodeus happens on the last day of the Harvest Month. It is said that then the barrier between this world and the realms of death and hell are the thinnest. In order to appease the wandering spirits and hunting devils, you must bribe them with treats and presents. Traditionally children dress up as monster and the adults give the treats (a kind of honey cookie being the usual present). When the worship of Asmodeus was banned by the Mitrans eighty years ago, this festival called the Asmodean Revel was also banned. But here in Ghastenhall, they didn't stop doing it. They just changed the name. It is now called the Angelian Revel to honor St. Angelo patron saint of monster hunters. But it is still identical.

7. The color of the moment is burgundy

Ghastenhall actually has a modest fashion community that designs new clothing that is aped throughout the kingdom. This year they seem to have decided that the only color worth wearing is burgundy. The shops are full of rich reds both as dresses and men's doublets. Burgundy is everywhere. Of course the cracks in this trend are already starting to show. Already a few designers are starting to whisper that burgundy is played out. What will next years color be? Who can say. Isn't fashion exciting?

8. Ghastenhall mints its own money

Most of the currency used in Talingarde comes from Matharyn, but Ghastenhall actually does mint their own coins thanks to an ancient grant given to the duke's family long ago. Therefore, you can find coins with the duke's head right along the side the king's head all over the city.

9. The Duke is unmarried and the city's most eligible bachelor

Duke Hadrian is in his early thirties, handsome and quite the ladies man. Yet he remains unmarried. This must change soon. The duke needs an heir! But the question on everyone's mind is who the lucky lady will be. The duke has already rejected the usual suspects amongst the aristocracy. Could it be the duke plans to marry a peasant? Such a scandal!

10. A Magical College?

Rumors fly that professor Tiberius Feign, a powerful and accomplished wizard may soon open Talingarde's first magical college. It is doubtful the Church will approve but what does the duke think? No one is sure.

The Mystery of the Princess Iris

The PCs may not recognize it but in Book Two it is likely they solved one of Ghastenhall's great mysteries – what happen to the Princess Iris? The story goes that the beautiful and yet capricious daughter of the duke left in the middle of the night to seek a life of adventure. She was never seen again. Every year on her birthday to this day a candle-lit vigil is held to pray for the Princess' safe return.

She must be dead – that was eighty years ago and she was human. Her grief stricken father, the duke, decreed that he and any of his line would trade anything if someone would tell him the fate of his beautiful, beloved daughter. That edict still stands and the current Duke is technically bound to it.

Princess Iris' fate was tragic. Bored with her gilded cage, she joined a group of adventures, went to Farholde, ran afoul of the Sons of the Pale Horseman and they killed her. She's been avenged – one of her fellow adventurers reported the location of the Horn of Abaddon to the Victor and he raided the place. Unfortunately, his men completely missed the fact that Princess Iris of Ghastenhall had been to the Horn first. Perhaps our band of villains during their seventh month stay did not.

If the PCs present the ring found in the Horn and some bones before the duke's court and weave a convincing tale of how they came to possess them, they may well be heralded with solving one of the realm's great mysteries. The duke has long had to endure a parade of charlatans claiming to have the solution to this riddle. The PCs at least have a somewhat plausible explanation and some evidence (though the duke presumes it's all a forgery).

The duke decides this could rid him of those pestering charlatans. So he accepts the PC's explanation and make a great show of offering them anything they desire. If the PCs ask for something ludicrous or impossible, he will have the ring more closely examined and will declare it a fake. Request such as "all the gold in the treasury " or "that they become the Duke's successor" are rebuffed.

However, if the PCs make a modest and simple request, the duke will grant it just so he can close the matter. The duke is prepared to pay up to a 10,000 gp reward. He also might knight one of the PCs. They could even ask for something related to their present mission. The PCs could get a guided tour of the Vale of Valtaerna that allows them access to the Gardens of Serenity for a single day, for example.

Ultimately, what to do with the duke's favor is left up to the PC's imagination.

Mitra: Lord of Light

There is no greater god more worshipped in Talingarde than the divine Mitra. In fact, to someone born in Talingarde it might seem that there is only one god. Mitra's worship is so dominant, so pervasive, that rivals are hardly noted.

No god is more present in the lives of average Talireans and yet Mitra remains mysterious. His statues (and the deity is always described as a 'he') have no face. In his holy booka "Mitra" is revealed to not be his true name. Mitra simply means "friend". To know his true name is to be part of Mitra and no living mortal can accomplish this.

Further, Mitra is not one deity. One of the central tenets of the Mitran faith is that while Mitra is one, he is also three. These three aspects have individual names and natures. They are Mitra the Shining Lord, Mitra the Beneficent Sun and Mitra the Fire Undying. Different priests and sects emphasize different facets of Mitra and thus it can seem they are worshipping very different gods.

The Shining Lord is a god of kings and conquerors. This is the god of righteous might and great civilizations. He is a patron of the strong and the lordly. The Shining Lords bids that those with power use it for the greater good. He is lord of paladins and heroes, true enough, but he is also the patron of scholars and sages.

He urges all to seek a greater purpose and to find within this world the truth. Together we can make a better world and if we will but keep the faith, then one day all will be light. When portrayed in stone the Shining Lord is often portrayed a great king wielding a sword, wearing a crown and resplendent in the finery of kings.

The Beneficent Sun is more passive. Yes, we should help those in need. But it is more important to be at peace and to find within ourselves the light. The sun shines on both the wicked and the worthy. Its blessings extend to all. This aspect is much less anthropomorphic. In fact, it would be easy to say that this aspect is not human at all.

Instead this is the aspect of peace, healing and abundance. Mitra made all life and with his warming light he sustains it. Everything that happen, weal or woe, is his will. Be at peace with this truth even in dark times. The Sun may set but it will rise again. When portrayed in stone, this is the god of healers often clad in a robe with arms outstretched.

The Fire Undying is not so patient as the gentle sun. This is the inquistor's god – the god of the pyre and the witch hunter. The Fire Undying seeks out evil and burns it from this world. The Fire cares nothing for civilization or serenity unless they aid in this unyielding cause. The fire of war has been lit. It was not Mitra who started it. This war for the souls of all mortals was started in the pits of hell. But now the war cannot be ignored and it is a struggle that the Fire must win. When you extend mercy to evil, you are only allowing it fester. The Fire will burn the rot out and from the ashes, we will at last have peace.

These three aspects may seem at odds with each other, but the true theologian of Mitra sees their hidden unity. Behind them all is a great benevolence and a will to see the mortal races improve and ennoble themselves. The three aspects have different methods – but they all have the same goal. They would see the free peoples of the world turn their backs on evil and embrace nobility and goodness. Behind all three here is the light of Mitra.

Priests of Mitra

Every priest of Mitra must choose which aspect he chooses to primarily follow.

Mitra the Shining Lord

Alignment: LG
Portfolios: the Sun, Justice, Honor, Charity, Valor
Domains: Glory, Good, Law, Sun, Nobility
Subdomains: Archon, Day, Heroism, Honor, Leadership, Light
Preferred Weapon: Longsword

Mitra the Beneficent Sun

Alignment: NG
Portfolios: the Sun, Healers, Mercy, Serenity
Domains: Community, Good, Healing, Protection, Sun
Subdomains: Day, Defense, Home, Light, Restoration, Ressurection,
Preferred Weapon: Quarterstaff

The Fire Undying

Alignment: LG
Portfolios: the Sun, judgment, fire, purification, the destruction of evil
Domains: Fire, Good, Strength, Sun, War
Subdomains: Archon, Day, Ferocity, Light, Resolve, Tactics
Preferred Weapon: Warhammer

Overwhelmingly most priests follow the Shining Lord or the Beneficent Sun. Less than one in fifty hears the call of the Fire Undying.

Mitran priests are allowed to marry and in fact about half do so. These priest-wives hold an honored place in the Church and often become temple care-takers. Many of the more monastic orders of the church either require celibacy or strongly encourage it. This has less to do with the teachings of Mitra and much more to do with the practical matters of living in a monastery.

Mitran priests are not required to be male. In fact some of the most famous orders of the Church (for example the Abbey of Saint Cynthia-Celeste) are entirely female. Still the majority of priests in the hierarchy of the Church are male and this shows no signs of changing. This again has far more to with Talirean culture than any requirements of Mitra himself. The teachings of Mitra are completely gender equitable. Neither man nor woman is called superior to other. Both must seek the light of the blessed Mitra.

Mitra in the Real World

Mitra (or Mithra) is a deity derived from real world mythology. Mitra was important in ancient Persia where the word literally mean 'friend'. A god of contracts, treatings and agreements – Mitra ironically has a lot in common with how Asmodeus is often portrayed as a god of lawyers and negotiators.

Mithra of Zoroastrianism originates from the earlier Mitra and is again a good of truth and contracts. Mithras of the Greek and Roman mystery religions probably arrives from the same source.

It was just these sort of mythological references that caused famed pulp writer Robert E. Howard to make Mitra an important god of the Hyborian Age. Conan actually speaks about Mitra in "Queen of the Black Coast" saying "Mitra of the Hyborians must be a strong god, because his people have builded their cities over the world."

In Howard's writing Mitra is often portrayed as at war with a dark god – Set. In our tale the role of Set has been replaced by Asmodeus, but the two are easily interchangeable.

There is a difference between being a member of the Church of Mitra and being a priest of Mitra. Though the overlap between these two groups is almost total, there are occassionally exceptions. The Church of Mitra includes the seven levels of service (detailed below) and all the associated minor orders (for example the Order of St. Macarius fits here). These individuals have all taken an oath not just to Mitra but also to serve the Church and its High Cardinal.

A priest of Mitra is simply anyone who chooses to worship Mitra and in particular anyone who Mitra chooses to grant the ability to use divine magic. Every once in a while someone will manifest the ability to use divine magic who has never taken the oath to the church and who has never perhaps even worn a priest's robe.

These are rarities to be sure. The relationship between these "freelance" priests and the Church has always been a strained one. The Church would prefer that as soon as such a priest is revealed that he take the oath and join the Church hierarchy. However, sometime the priest refuses and goes his own way. These rogue priests often become adventurers or wandering servants of Mitra. Their very existence is infuriating to the Church. They cannot deny that Mitra has chosen these individuals, they just don't understand why they can't join with their brothers and support the Church.

Ceremonies and Practices

There is no standard canon of Mitran worship and so the exact nature of that worship varies from temple to temple. However certain things are shared more or less everywhere that Mitra is revered.

Mitra is worshipped at the start of every week on the appropriately named Sunday. At first light on Sunday all the ordained devotees of Mitra are ready and robed and bow as the sun arises over the horizon. The intone the Blessing of the Light giving thanks that the light of Mitra has returned to bless another week.

This is followed by a purification ritual of washing in fresh water (preferably conjured by divine magic) that makes the priests ready to conduct the weekly service later in the day. The Sunday service is primarily social. Followers gather and discuss the business of the week before beginning the more formal portions of the ceremony.

The Priest calls the followers to order with a prayer. After that, this is where the ceremonies really vary. In some places, the lay people then light a candle or a representative lights a candle. Sometimes there's singing. The specifics really matter very little. All that matters is that the gatherings are done with an open heart and with genuine devotion.

However the service is not over until a priest prays to Mitra, lights a candle and then as the candle burns delivers a short lesson on how to live in accordance with the will of Mitra. The tradition is that the sermon cannot continue longer than it takes the small traditional wax candles to burn (which is about thirty minutes). Every follower of Mitra has heard the joke about the priest and his wicked congregation that begins with him hauling in a candle the size of a tree trunk.

With the lesson done, the congregation is dismissed and the priest makes himself available for personal discussions or private moments of advice. Often this is a priest's major role in the community. In small farming communities the priest may be the most educated and respected person in town. The priest may serve as the marriage counselor, legal advisor, and town psychiatrist. They can answer questions about law, read documents (illiteracy is the rule amongst Talingarde's peasants) and generally advise the townsfolk in any matter that may be troubling them.

Mitra has no formal ritual of confession and yet that is what many priests end up doing after the worship services.

Besides the weekly ceremonies there are other days of great importance to Mitra. The Summer Solstice -- the longest day of the year is the most important Mitran holiday. A week of festivals and religious celebrations lead up to the day of the Solstice itself. At the dawn of the longest day of the year a special communion occurs. The high point of the communion is ritual *Calling Forth Light*.

Every congregation of Mitra tries to have a divine spellcaster in attendance who can cast a light spell. Failing that, a minor magical light is used (usually a specially prepared *sunrod*). More influential Churches might even have someone cast *daylight*. The great Cathedral in Matharyn has the spell *sunbeam* cast seven times by seven different priests. The super-intense beams are focused upon a great crystalline sunburst of Mitra that breaks the beams into a dazzling cascade of angelic light.

After the communion, later that day, is the Feast of Abundance where everyone enjoys the gifts of the sun in one great meal. Anything can be served in these feasts but a Feast of Abundance is deemed poor indeed if you can't afford one of the traditional angel cakes. An angel cake is a hearty confection sweetened with honey filled with fruits and nuts and then soaked in brandy. After the brandy has had enough time for the alcohol to evaporate, whats left behind is a sweet, dense dark cake enjoyed by everyone. There are some monastic orders who specialize in preparing these angel cakes and sell them during the festivals before the Solistice and use the money to help the poor of Talingarde.

The other day of almost equal importance is the Winter Solstice. Upon this day candles are lit and prayers are made that in the darkest depths of winter, still eventually the sun will return. It is a much more solemn occassion but still no less observed. And after the service, there is another feast. The Winter's Feast is a racuous fair where gifts are exchanged, food is eaten and often a great deal of wine and ale is consumed.

Special "warming" wines are prepared by steeping herbs and fruit in wine and sweetening it with honey. The Church of Mitra usually takes a dim view of drunkeness but upon this one day a year it is almost encouraged. After all one of the most important parts of the Winter's Feasts is all the toasting and well wishing for the sun to return and for there to be a prosperous new year.

Many saints also have important festivals but these are usually more local. No other holidays are celebrated as universally as the two solstices. After all, first and foremost Mitra is a sun god. What days should be more revered than the longest and the shortest days?

Heirarchy of the Church

The church of Mitra in Talingarde adheres to a fairly rigid hierarchy. This hierarchy is little understood or cared about outside of the church and very few non-priests can name all seven tiers of the hierarchy.

The Seven Tiers

The First Tier – The Novices

Before a priest can be a priest, he must first become a novice. To join the ranks of the novices an applicant must find a full priest (third tier and above) and receive their sponsorship. Applying for sponsorship can be an intricate process in the most influential temples or it can simply mean showing up and helping the priest clean up (as is often the case in the more rural temples).

Priests vary on what they require to sponsor a novice. The larger temples usually require some sort of education and understanding of basic Mitran theology. In the rural areas it is usually enough to simply show an eagerness to serve the priest and a genuine devotion to Mitra. Novices can be of any age but typically they join somewhere between twelve and fifteen years of age and remain novices till they are eighteen or nineteen.

Novices have no formal title, though they are often called "little brothers" or "little sisters" as more a title of affection.

The Second Tier – The Initiates

After a Novice has satisfied a priest (rank three) and met with his approval, they may petition a High Priest (rank four) to be initiated into the Order. Most High Priests perform this initiation only once or twice a year on certian high holy days. And it is almost unheard of for an initiate to be accepted without a sponsoring priest. Special exceptions may be made if, for example, their sponsor died.

The Initiate now takes the Church Oath. The Oath is long and formal but the gist of it is this: *I live to serve the divine Mitra and his Church. They are my first loyalty and I will never betray them. I will serve them forever and may Mitra smite me if I forsake this oath.*

The oath is often traditionally recited in Celestial and some older more traditional high priests still require this. Note that reciting this oath does not require speaking Celestial. You can simply memorize the words and in fact many initiates do not fully understand exactly what they swore. As soon as the oath is taken the novice is transformed into an initiate and from then is entitled to be called a "Brother" or "Sister" of the church.

Initiates are assigned all the menial tasks that the church requires. They often learn a useful trade. It is not uncommon for many initiates to also be skilled carpenters, painters, masons, scribes, brewers or herbalists. All that they do is to for the good of the church.

Though there is no formal difference between peasants and noble initiates codified in the law of the Church, in reality there very much is. The noble initiates are often on the fast track to become high priests and bishops. The peasant initiates may serve for years before they are even given the chance to become priests.

The Third Tier – The Priests

After an initiate has served at least two years (and sometims considerably more), he comes before a bishop (rank five) and presents himself for testing. The bishop asks as many questions of the Initiate as the bishop deems necessary and the initiate must answer them fully and faithfully. Exactly what the bishops ask is at the bishop's discretion. Some ask questions of theology. Others inquire about the initiate's past and loyalties. Other might ask if the initiate wants some tea.

Whatever the questioning entails, if the bishop is satisified with the initiate's honesty, integrity and committment to the Church, then the priest is ordained. The ritual of ordainment requires no further oaths and is in fact a magical ritual. The priest is blessed and touched directly by the hand of Mitra. Exactly what this means is a very personal sensation and few priests will ever speak of it. What is certain is that experience changes many men. Many novices enter into the priesthood of Mitra merely eager for a place to stay and a way to live. By the time they are priests, they are almost certainly faithful adherents of the worship of the divine Mitra.

Once ordained a priest is then and forever a full member of the Church of Mitra. They now have the title "father".

Priests are the work horses of the Order. The tend the temples, manage the day to day affairs, recruit and manage the novices, assign the initiates to tasks and generally make the Church function. In the smallest temples (particularly rural temples) a single priest may be the sole and highest ranking member of the clergy present.

Priests can preside over marriages, births and funerals. They can give blessings in the name of Mitra and even have some special legal priviledge in Talingarde. For example, a sheriff may hold a normal citizen on suspicion of a crime. A priest of Mitra can only be held if the Sheriff brings formal charges.

The Fourth Tier – The High Priests

Each Cardinal from time to time selects priests (usually the most senior and veteran of the priests) who must lead the ceremonies and generally manage all the doings in the temples. If the Church of Mitra is an army, then the High Priests are its sergeants. Most priests will never rise higher than this rank and this is the highest rank most peasants have a reasonable chance of achieving.

High Priests have all the same responsibilities and priviledges as normal priests and are still addressed as "father". The only really visible difference is that while priests usually wear a blue robe, high priests wear a blue robe with a white sash. The difference is subtle enough that many followers of Mitra may not even be sure who the temple's high priest actually is.

In many smaller temples, the high priest is the most veteran member of the clergy present.

In some of the more rural communities there is a tradition of high priests being armed. They often carry ceremonial longswords and have titles like "Guardian of the Church" or "Sergeant of the Church". Whether these armed priests no how to use their blade is another matter entirely.

The Fifth Tier – The Bishops

The gulf between the High Priests and the Bishops is wide. Almost all bishops are of noble blood and they are addressed as "Blessed Father". Bishops are men of power in Talingarde and often sit upon the councils of the local lord. Many of them have personal guards and private retinues. They often live in a palace. They are wealthy, influential members of the community at the least.

Bishops are the assistants of the cardinal and his direct underlings. They control the larger and more prominent temples and see to the management of the lesser temples (which are assigned to high priests).

The Cardinals assign each Bishop to manage a region or town and is is there responsibility to see its spiritual needs are well met. This level of the priesthood is almost completely unconcerned with conducting the rituals and ceremony of the church. Instead, these are managers, keeping the affairs of the church in good working order.

They have another important function. It the responsibility of the Bishop to collect the Tithe. Every lord of Talingarde, by order of the king, is required to pay ten percent of his income to the Church of Mitra. This tithe is often a lot of money and it is the bishop's responsibility to collect and manage these funds.

The Sixth Tier – The Seven Cardinals

The High Cardinal (the seventh tier) may elevate a bishop to serve as a cardinal. There are only seven Cardinals in Talingarde: The Cardinal of Ghastenhall, Daveryn, the Wilds (includes all of the Caer Bryr), Havelyn (effectively the northern Heartlands), Vaasten (the southern Heartlands) and Estyllis (effectively the borderlands). Between these seven regions and the High Cardinal in Matharyn, the entire isle of Talingarde south of the Watch Wall is divided up.

These powerful princes of the Church oversee all church business in their area and their orders can only be countermanded by the High Cardinal himself. In Talingarde almost all Cardinals are of noble blood and usually come from prominent families of great renown.

To be a cardinal of the Church of Mitra in Talingarde is to be one of the most influential men in the kingdom. Only the greatest of lords and military commanders can rival them. When a cardinal issues an order it is a serious matter.

Cardinal are always addressed as "Your Eminence".

The Seventh Tier – The High Cardinal, Most Holy

The High Cardinal is selected by the election of the seven cardinals. The seven cardinals can technically elevate anyone to this post who is a devout follower of Mitra, but they always choose one of their own number. The appointment is for a lifetime and there has never been a case of a High Cardinal being removed from office prematurely. If such a thing needed to be done there is no real mechanism for it.

The High Cardinal lives the life of a king and in many ways a king is exactly what he is. Only one man in Talingarde wields more power than the High Cardinal and that is the King himself. Fortunately the House of Darius and the Church of Mitra are close allies. If they were to squabble it is uncertain which would command greater respect from the people, the aristrocracy and the military of the kingdom.

The High Cardinal dresses in a robe of pure white silk that can upon command glow with the light of the sun. He doubtless wields countless other magical treasures. He is always addressed as "Most Holy".

The High Cardinal commands a sizeable personal guard and has the complete loyalty of the Knights of the Alerion should he require other military forces. He has the entire wealth of the Church at his disposal.

There can only be one High Cardinal of the Church of Mitra in Talingarde and currently that is Vitalian of Estyllis. He resides in Matharyn in the almost unimaginably opulent Palace of the Sun and presides over a Church of Mitra that has never been more politically powerful or more widespread across Talingarde.

Vitalian is an older man of noble blood and is a distant cousin of the Duke of Daveryn. In fact, he was cardinal of Daveryn before his elevation. He is one of King Markadian's most trusted advisors and therefore wields immense power within the kingdom of Talingarde.

He is a conservative member of the clergy and believes that change within the Church is likely dangerous and unwarranted. He is not a spellcaster and has always been sensitive about this. Yet, he is still a loyal follower of Mitra and does all that he can to see the Church prosper.

Vitalian is unsure what to make of the current war. He wants to see it cease certainly and victory won but has trouble believing that mere bugbears could be responsible for such carnage. He is loathe to restart the Asmodean purges. He knows better than most how many innocents were swept up in the last round. But he senses a great building evil and is unsure how to stop its advance.

Still his conservative nature make him slow to act. He is certain that once King Markadian takes the field that victory will be quickly won against this horrid, barbarous Fire-Axe. That would be his preferred resolution to this present unpleasantness.

Vitalian of Estyllis is further detailed in Book IV.

Priests and Politics

The Church of Mitra touts itself as a non-political organization that does not care to meddle in matters of kings and countries. This is quite frankly a blatant lie. The Church o f Mitra is an immensely political organization deeply involved in the politics of its day.

The Church of Mitra has three objectives which inevitably entangle in political matters:

1) Keep House Darius on the Throne of Talingarde

2) Keep Foreign Gods out of Talingarde

3) Limit the Influence of Scholars and Wizards

The first goal is not particularly controversial. The overwhelming majority of the people and aristocracy of Talingarde support King Markadian V. There is no serious movement to dethrone him (except for the PCs).

But the second goal puts them in direct conflict with both merchants and the Duke of Ghastenhall. Merchants want open trade with anyone who cares to visit this island. Open trade means foreign influences and where foreigners congregate, the inevitably bring their heathen faiths.

The Church is realistic that it cannot ban outside trade but it has petitioned for a rule that foreign ships can only dock at Matharyn. Docking at the capitol would mean that the Church could keep a close eye on foreign visitors and in its orthodox stronghold the chance of any outside gods gaining much purchase is basically nothing. This ban is vehemently opposed by Duke Hadrian. The duke has grown rich taxing foreign ships eager to do business with this rich but isolated island. So far the duke has managed to keep this ban from gaining any serious traction but the Church is patient. It has not given up.

The third goal also has earned the Church no small number of enemies. The City of Ghastenhall is a center of learning and the scholars chafe under the ever growing number of outside books that are banned because they contain some tiny amount of content the Church considers dangerous. The Great Library of Ghaster could be one of the great repositories of learning in the world if only the Church of Mitra would lift its bans.

In this matter the Church currently has the upper hand. The King has no patience for heretics and any scholar who steps outside of Church orthodoxy could find himself meeting with an inquisitor in less than pleasant circumstances. It is not illegal in Talingarde to believe in other gods besides Mitra. It is however illegal to blaspheme against Mitra. Blasphemy is a very vague law and exactly what it means can depend on how greatly someone has offended the Church. Every year or two, a scholar steps over the line and earns himself a trip to the pyre. Every time it occurs the hatred between scholars and priests only deepens.

Wizards too chafe under Mitran rule. Mitran priests willfully spread distrust of arcane magic amongst the people. There are whole hosts of avenues of magical study that are forbidden to pursue under the edicts of the church. Knowing even a little necromancy or how to summon a fiendish creature can earn you being purged with flame.

Time and time again the Church has shown it has no tolerance for arcane casters who question their authority. This means that there is a very powerful group of largely good aligned wizards who would love to see the Church disappear. How this will effect Church power remains to be seen.

The Inquisition

The Inquisition is the Church's most secretive, feared and misunderstood arm. First, understand that the Inquisition is not actually part of the Church. The Inquisition exists by royal decree. When Markadian I called the Victorious came to power he made blasphemy against Mitra, heresy and witchcraft crimes. They had not been crimes before. The Barcan kings had rules against destructive magics and certain forms of summoning, but those pragmatic monarchs could care less what and how you worshipped.

To enforce these new crimes, the King needed special investigators who could detect and punish these often elusive criminals. He turned to the High Cardinal of the Church of Mitra and asked for assistance. Most Holy was only too glad to offer aid. He gathered his finest witch hunters and had them pledge their service to the Victor. Thus the Inquisition was born.

All members of the Inquisition are members of the Church of Mitra. They must be, because only the High Cardinal can recommend them to the crown and he only recommends members of the Church in good standing. They then put aside their other church duties, swear oaths of absolute loyalty and secrecy and join a special group of high priests (Tier 4) tasked to hunt down those who violate the Victor's sacred laws.

The royal warrant that these Inquisitors receives is incredibly broad. It empowers the inquisitors to go anywhere, question anyone and deliver Mitra's justice. All inquisitors must be able to cast divine spells of Mitra (thus they are either clerics, inquisitors, oracles or paladins of Mitra). Therefore, it is presumed, as long as they still have Mitra's blessing and can still cast spells they are clearly doing the god's will and need no oversight.

What this means is that the Inquisitors are a law unto themselves. When an Inquisitor condemns you there is no appeal and there is no recourse. You are condemned. The Inquisitor may take you to a prison to hold you temporarily but in the end your fate is sealed.

There are thankfully not many Inquisitors. There are less than twenty operating in all of Talingarde. Few have the talent to take on the role and those that do often die in their duties. Constantly hunting evil is a dangerous task even in a place as comparatively peaceful as Talingarde. Now that the war is started and evil openly prowls Talingarde, the life of an Inquisitor is even more dangerous. By this point in the campaign our band of villains has already fought one.

They will meet others.

Magic Amongst the Faithful

Most priests of Mitra go their entire life without casting a single "spell". Actual spellcasters remain a rarity within the Church. Very few of the High Cardinals have been spellcasters. And even now only three of the Cardinals can perform even a few minor divine spells. This doesn't mean the other clergy are unfaithul or somehow lesser. Mitra chooses few to channel his divine might so directly.

Official church orthodoxy is this. Being a spellcaster does not entitle you to any special treatment within the church hierarchy. It means that Mitra has a purpose for you. Spellcasting is never bestowed without a reason. It is your sacred duty to find that purpose and see that it is fulfilled. The hierarchy of Church tries their best to both recognize and respect these callings. Unfortunately this is not always the case.

Jealousy is an ugly thing and a petty emotion that the Church downplays. But there is no denying that many powerful men within the Church are envious of those who Mitra has chosen to gift with the power of divine magic. Why are they chosen? Why not me? What have I done, great and powerful Mitra, for you to forsake me? These are common questions amongst those who are denied.

This jealousy is made worse because of the way that spellcasters are treated by the common man. Anyone who can cast a divine spell of Mitra is welcome with open arms into a thousand small towns through Talingarde. The people flock to these miracle workers. They want to see these amazing deeds. They want to hear what these miracle workers have to say. Who cares what the cardinal thinks? What does a true cleric of Mitra have to say on the matter?

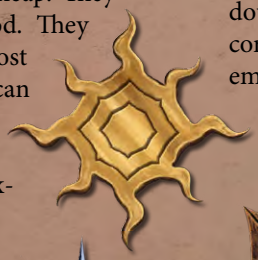
This jealously means that the spellcasters are sometimes poorly treated by the hierarchy. Ironically the Church has from time to time dealt with its most powerful and gifted agents like they were enemies and outsiders. Spellcasters may find themselves denied resources and assistance. They may discover that a local cardinal or bishop is too busy to speak with them.

The Order of Saint Macarius has unsurprisingly suffered this discrimination more than most. The Order should be treated like one of the Church's most valuable resources. But because of jealously, they are often left to fend for themselves. The only reason that the PC's raid against Valtaerna has a chance to succeed (see Act Three above) is because the Church of Mitra has not stationed more security there.

Holy Symbols and Heraldry

Mitran priests are unusual amongst the faiths that they do not have a standard holy symbol. Some priests use graven wooden symbols, other use silver and still others have more expensive custom symbols adorned with sapphire. Those who wish to emphasize the fiery nature of the sun god often have golden holy symbols decorated with stylized images of flame. The Hierarchy of the Church seems to care little about this issue and so holy symbols are often seen almost as a mode of personal expression.

Wooden holy symbols connote humility and poverty. They reveal a priest unconcerned with displaying the wealth of this world. Ironically, wooden holy symbols are often not cheap. They can be made of fine teak and ebon wood. They can be lacquered and varnished almost to a mirror shine. The workmanship can be every bit as exquisite as anything a metal worker has ever made. The fine details within the wood can only be expressed by a true master of the craft.



Silver holy symbols are actually the most common holy symbol in all of Talingarde. So many of these icons has been made over the years, it is doubtful that another ever needs be produced. And yet still, the white smiths in every major city busily keep producing them. This is understandable. They sell.

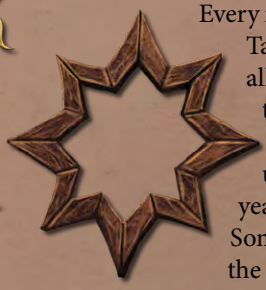
These holy symbols come in a million variations and are worn not just by priests but by devout followers of Mitra. The most common symbol on such a holy symbol is of course the Mitran sunburst. But also common are the phoenix, the eagle, the fire, the long sword (the Shining Lord's preferred weapon) or a stylized M or a V (for Victor -- the first Mitran king). Trying to describe how a standard silver holy symbol appears is like trying to describe a standard snow flake.

With the preferred color of the Mitra priesthood being blue it is no surprise that sapphire holds a special place in their hearts. The pure blue found in a flawless sapphire instantly appeals and in fact some priests call sapphire by the name "Saramanda" -- celestial for the sacred flame.

Sapphire however is expensive. There are no sapphire mines in Talingarde and so it must all be imported at great cost. Therefore to have a holy symbol adorned with sapphire is not just a symbol of devotion, it is also a symbol of wealth and influence.

Mitran lords, knights and warriors do not show their devotions only through holy symbols. They also use a wide variety of heraldry to show their piety for all to see. The most common heraldric iconography are all variations on the blue white Mitran sunburst.

Here again there are thousand variants. The Knights of the Alerion (their shield is shown below) adorn their heraldry with the double headed eagle. The Princess Belinda uses a unicorn as a symbol of purity. The Order of St. Macarius employes angel wings and the inscription VMI – Via Mitra Invictus (by Mitra I am invincible).



Every minor knight and noble throughout Talingarde wishes both to show their allegiance to the House of Darius and the Church of Mitra. But they must follow the laws of heraldry and use unique symbolism. After all these years that can be quite challenging. Some of the shields seen in support of the Church trying to be both original and pious can be almost humorous.

Famously one knight when into battle for the Victor with a shield that read "Fermeta". When later the knight distinguished himself, the King asked to meet good sir Fermeta. No one came forward.

Only later did the Victor learn that Fermeta was the illiterate knight's best attempt at spelling "For Mitra". Such errors and in particular degenerate celestial quotations proliferate on the shields of country knights even to this day.

What is certain is that throughout Talingarde thousands of knights etch the heraldry of Mitra on their shields because they conceive of themselves as agents of his will. They make lack theological sophicstication but not dedication. The will die to protect the Undying Flame.

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Hail Asmodeus, God of Lawyers, Master of Contracts

"There is no instance of a nation benefitting from prolonged warfare."

--Sun Tzu

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Lands of the Yutak
Savage North
Farholde
Horn of Abaddon
Seal Isle
Bugbear Camp
Lake Tarik
The Borderlands
Balentyne
Heartland
Ambryl
Lorringsgate
Upandershire Ford
Janderly Farms
Tarrington Fields
Vale of Valtaerna
Westkirk Castle
Ghastenhall
Temple of Beauty
Daveryn
Zhaanzen-Kryr
Laer Bryr
Cambrian Bay
Branderscar
Matharyn
N
The Kingdom of Talingarde
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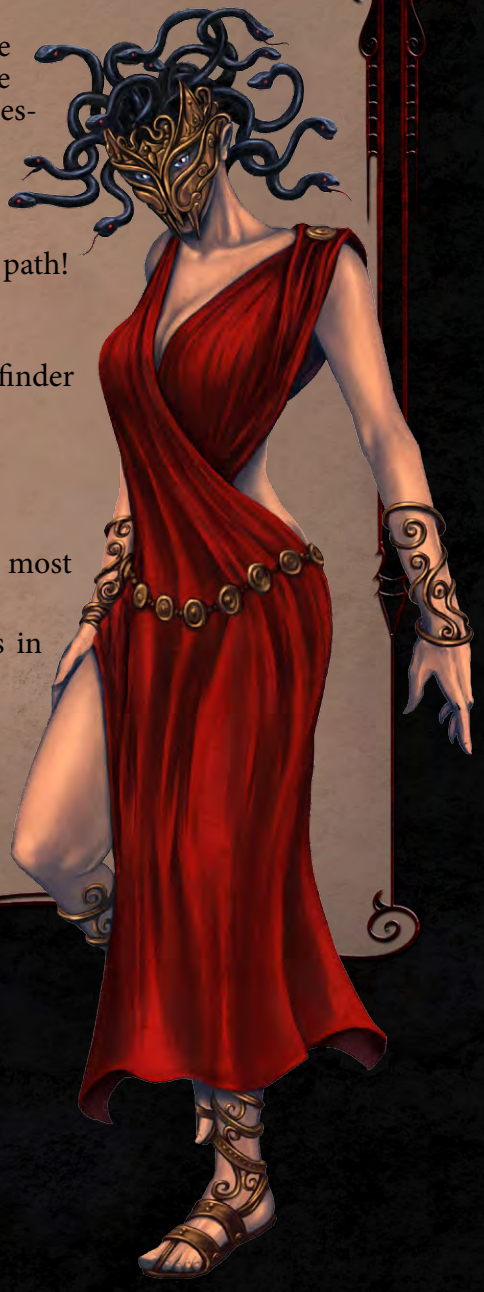
Miles

Way of the Wicked

Lead an Army of Darkness into Battle

Inside the Vale of Valtaerna is found the most sacred site to the benevolent god Mitra in all of Talingarde. From this holy site, your enemies draw power and comfort. This is the story of how you raised an army of wickedness and stormed that stronghold of light slaughtering all who stood in your way!

No longer are you a petty servant of darkness. Here is your chance to become a master of evil. But beware! This will not be easy. There are more than just priests in the vale. This is the lair of countless good celestials who will do all in their power to stop your rise. Can you defeat them? Will you be destroyed or will you emerge triumphant amidst the tears of the blessed?



Welcome to the third chapter of the "Way of the Wicked" adventure path!

Inside you'll find:

- "Tears of the Blessed," an adventure compatible with the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game for 10th-level villains by Gary McBride
- Full color art and maps by Michael Clarke
- A gazetteer of the city of Ghastenhall
- Detailed information about the Church of Mitra, your most determined foes.
- All you need to run a vicious narrative battle with your PCs in command.

And More!

Raise your army, dark lord, and march to war. There will be no one to stop you this time!

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